原案／HoneyWorks
著／藤谷燈子

告白予行練習

角川ビーンズ文庫

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Confession Rehearsal Novel (Intro & Chapter 1)

Happy Valentine’s Day! Today I’d like to share a translation of the first chapter

of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks' "**(Confession Rehearsal) Kokuhoku Yokou Renshuu**" about Natsuki, a third-year at Sakuragaoka High School, who holds unrequited feelings for her childhood friend, Yuu, who's in the Film Club. However, instead of being honest about her feelings, she makes him her confession "rehearsal" partner. Unable to say her true feelings, things start to get complicated when Miou and Akari, who are also in the Art Club, get involved! Will she ever be able to confess for real!?

HoneyWorks also uploaded a new song today, called "Confession Rival Declaration", featuring Ayase Koyuki that's introduced briefly in this first chapter.

Masterpost will links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
By the way, there's short profiles before each chapter, so I've included them in there, as well. You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

Chapter 2→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon! (also, I most likely won't be scanning the illustrations, so if you'd like to see them, there's another reason to buy it)

——

introduction

"It's already been seven years since then, huh……"

I pull out the yearbook from the back of my closet and mutter this to myself.

On the cover is the name of my Alma mater, and my current workplace, "Sakuragaoka High School."

"So nostalgic. The design hasn't changed at all, either."

If I were to compare it with the yearbook that had been passed out in the faculty room the other day, I wouldn't be able to tell which was mine. The differences are as slight as spotting a light tan.

"Never really had the chance to look through this again since graduating."

I'm about to open it up for the first time in a while, but my slightly trembling fingers only lift the cover.

"…… Gosh, aren't I being a bit too nervous here?"

I laugh softly and turn my eyes downcast.

After taking a deep breath, I slowly turn the page.

"Wow, everyone's so young!"

Of course, it isn't anything like looking at a kindergarten or elementary school yearbook, where some people might be almost unrecognizable. Still, there's something innocent about the smiles of my friends in the photos.

My short, soft hair hasn't changed, but compared to now, I had a much more demure look back then.

During high school, I'd often hang out in a six-person group of three girls and three guys.

Nowadays, we still meet up to talk about the old days, or catch up with each other.

Except for one person.

"I wonder how they're doing……"

We hadn't met since graduation, but I always remember them smiling bright like the sun.

When I close my eyes, my memories of high school come back in vivid detail.

The memories of those bright, bittersweet days where I'd always given it my all.

—

Enomoto Natsuki

Birthday: June 27
Horoscope Sign: Cancer
Blood Type: O

Loves to exercise and draw manga. In the Art Club. Currently has one-sided

feelings for Yuu, but can't bring herself to be honest about them.

—

practice 1

It all started with a letter.

Placed in her childhood friend, Setoguchi Yuu's shoe locker—a love letter. He had been called to the back of the gym during the lunch break, been confessed to by a cute, underclassman girl with short hair, and come back to the classroom afterwards.

"I just turned her down, seeing as how entrance exams are coming up, too."

Natsuki let out a sigh of relief when Yuu reported this in a plain tone.

However, her heart immediately went wild again. Although he pretended like it was nothing, her childhood friend was blushing in a way she'd never seen before.

'*I thought for sure that Yuu wasn't interested in love or anything like that……*'

Even after school, the words that Natsuki had held back still lingered in her heart.

Since she was so focused on video games, manga, and club activities all the time, she'd never really talked to him about love and things before. She realized that was the only reason why she assumed he wasn't interested.

He may have turned down the confession this time, but who knew what would happen next time.

It was at that moment that Natsuki decided she wouldn't run away anymore.

'…… *I'll confess today, for sure*!'

Taking a deep breath, Natsuki looked up at Yuu's back.

It was thirty minutes before school let out, and they were the only two at the shoe lockers.

She had their mutual childhood friend, Serizawa Haruki, who was in the Film Club with Yuu, agree to go home by himself today. Well, more correctly, he had gotten fed up with her and forced the two of them to be alone together.

‘…… *I feel like my heart could leap out of my chest*……’

As she gripped the front of her shirt, the beating of her heart made it feel surprisingly close.

Underneath the track pants that she wore under her skirt, her knees knocked against each other.

‘*What do I do? Maybe I should just wait until tomorrow*.’

For a moment, her weak side bubbled up.

Recalling her childhood friend’s embarrassed face, she was somehow able to stand her ground.

In her head, she knew that when it came to romance, timing was crucial. She’d seen in shoujo manga how a potential couple would miss their chance because they waited too long.

All she needed was a moment of courage.

On the other hand, regret would last a lifetime.

‘*—I, Enomoto Natsuki, will now carry out the plan*!’

“Yuu! Do you have a minute?”

As the light of the sunset streamed in through the window, Natsuki forced out those words.

Yuu turned around slowly, and with a strange look on his face, their eyes met.

“What’re you being so formal for?”

Natsuki tightened her posture so that her voice wouldn’t tremble, clenched her fists and then said,

“I’m sorry it’s so sudden, but…..”

She knew that Yuu was probably feeling nervous, too, because of how the atmosphere between them felt different than usual.

Taking a deep breath, Natsuki looked straight at him and said the words that she had been holding back for so many years.

“I’ve liked you for a long time now!”

She said it. She’d finally said it.

Even without having to look in a mirror, she knew that her face was burning red.

Unable to stand it, she averted her gaze, and this time, she could hear the sound of her heart pounding in her ears. It was louder than before, making her wonder if even Yuu would be able to hear it at this rate.

As she slowly lifted her face again, Yuu stood completely still, as if taken aback.

Their eyes met in an instant.

Yuu didn’t seem to realize the reality of it yet, and practically breathed out his next word,

“…… Huh?”

That one word was in the form of a question, but it was more than enough.

‘*Yuu is… embarrassed*….!?’

It had to be just her over thinking that his face appeared redder than when that underclassman girl had confessed to him.

In reaction to this unexpected turnout, Natsuki was also at a loss for words.

‘*I…. I have to say something*…..’

She cast her gaze sideways and tried to search for the words, but the only thing that came out of her mouth was a nonsensical sound.

“Ju…. Ju….”

“Ju?”

Yuu, whose face was still red, tilted his head in confusion.

Although he was close to 180 centimeters tall, that cute behavior really suited him.

‘*I want to pat his head*…..’

Even Natsuki was surprised at the thought that had suddenly popped up in

her hand. She knew that she couldn't think straight right now. At this rate, she'd end up blurting out something unnecessary.

Before that could happen, she quickly changed the subject.

"Just kidding! There's no way that'd actually be true! Did I get ya good?"

'*I've really done it this time*,'

She thought immediately.

'*No, but just now, that was just another strategy*…..'

With that fleeting thought, Natsuki realized something.

Right, it was the same in both love and war.

So she wasn't running from the enemy; she was just buying time for the next strategy.

More specifically, this time's confession rehearsal had been a surprise attack.

Yuu widened his eyes, and as if trying to take in Natsuki's statement, blinked several times in a row.

After a little while, he tousled his hair some and returned her gaze with a sharp look.

"Natsuki…. You're really……"

Natsuki heaved a sigh of relief at his tone of voice that sounded half-shocked and half-embarassed.

'*Good… He thinks it was a joke…. right*?'

She pretended not to hear the painful twang her heart made and cracked a smile.

"Just now, that was a confession rehearsal."

"Huh? Rehearsal?"

"So? Was I cute? Did your heart skip a beat?"

Going along with the flow, she peered into Yuu's face, and he looked back with a cold and hard stare.

In times like this, it was actually tougher when the other didn't say anything. In a panic, Natsuki's smile weakened.

"D-don't look at me like that….. I'm sorry….."

"So you're gonna get serious?"

"……Eh?"

This time, it was Natsuki's turn to become speechless.

Her heart pounded loudly. Almost painfully.

'*Was that a joke? Or…..*'

"I was kidding. Now we're even."

Just as she thought she saw him grin, Yuu's hand came down on her forehead with a chop.

And like it was part of a comedic sketch, Natsuki let out a cry at the blow.

"Gyah!? Hey, Yuu, go easy on me, would you!?"

Blatantly ignoring her complaint, he said, still with a sour look on his face,

"So, who're you doing the real thing with?"

"The real thing? You mean the confession?"

"Yeah. The fact that you're rehearsing means that there's someone else, right?"

Natsuki's breath stuck in her throat, seeing how easily he'd believed the lie she'd thought up on the spot.

But she knew it was her own fault for calling it a rehearsal.

Even so, and even if it was as a joke, she didn't want to be told that she had someone else she liked. Not from Yuu.

Natsuki pushed down her complicated thoughts and true feelings, and clenched her fists again.

And at the same time, she faced Yuu, who was waiting for an answer with a broad grin, and unleashed a round of blows on his ribs.

“There’s no way I can tell you!”

“Ow ow!!”

Natsuki bent over to meet eyes with her childhood friend, who was now slouching, and as usual, set out to secure their next promise.

“Hey, c’mon. Help me practice~”

“….. Guess I’ve got no choice. But in return, treat me to ramen.”

“Eh~ So stingy!”

“It’s a cheap price to get to practice with me, don’t you think?”

“Wow, are you saying that for real?”

Saying whatever they liked to each other, they would always end with a smile. It wasn’t that they’d decided on this out loud or anything, but it was like an unspoken rule between them now.

‘*But, today was… kind of…..*’

Along with a dull pain, her heart was crying out like it had been stabbed with needles.

‘*It’s so stressful to fall in love with someone. And it’s even more stressful to say how you really feel.*’

The sunset that day was red enough to make one’s eyes sting.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Listening to the afterschool bell chime, Natsuki let out a huge sigh.

‘*Shoot…. I totally slept through math today.*’

Although she’d gone to bed early yesterday, she’d woken up countless times throughout the night.

And to make things worse, she hadn’t had any appetite at breakfast or lunch.

‘*Isn’t this just like a girl in love? Well, actually, it is, but…..*’

Rehearsal or not, she had finally confessed yesterday.

And the one she had confessed to had been her childhood friend, the

recipient of her long-time unrequited feelings. He must have been nervous the whole time, much more than she could have imagined.

‘*The one good thing is that we can still talk like before*.’

Natsuki lived close to Yuu, and their seats in the classroom were close, too. Actually, she sat right in front of him.

Whenever they passed printouts down the rows during class, they’d always end up face-to-face. And if she fell asleep during class, he was close enough to wake her up before she got hit by the teacher.

‘….. *Come to think of it, I feel Yuu slept a lot today, too*.’

She couldn’t believe her eyes when she saw that surprisingly, even Yuu had a bed head, which swayed in the wind that blew in from the window. If she told him, though, he’d get self-conscious about it, so she decided not to say anything.

“Yuu~ Are we going straight to the clubroom?”

During lunch and afterschool, there were always people gathering around Yuu’s desk.

Right now, Mochizuki Souta, nickname: Mochita, came running up like a puppy.

Yuu, Haruki, Souta, and Natsuki were all childhood friends.

In particular, the guys had all joined the Film Club together, and chatted with each other with the same closeness they’d had when they were young.

“I have to stop by the faculty room, so you and Haruki go ahead first.”

“You’re gonna ask about the report for summer vacation, right? In that case, we’ll tag along too,”

Haruki grinned at Yuu’s words, smiling like a brightly beaming sun.

“Yeah. Alright then, let’s go!”

Souta nodded lightly and took a hold of Yuu’s arm.

Pulled along by the other two, Yuu left the classroom.

As Natsuki gazed after their departing figures, she mumbled unconsciously, "How nice….."

"The guys might get along well, but the girls won't lose to them, you know?"

She felt a tap on her shoulder, and then a soft, pleasant-sounding voice at her ear.

"Nacchan, let's go to the clubroom, too?"

After that, she was prompted by a modest, but gentle and kind voice.

"Akari, Miou……"

When she turned around, she saw her two friends standing there, smiling cheerfully.

The dark-haired pretty girl, Hayasaka Akari, and Aida Miou, with her soft, cute hair. They had met during high school, but since they had all joined the Art Club together, they'd become fast friends.

They all had things in common, but Natsuki also felt that they were friends that supported each other.

'*They must have come up to talk to me first since I've been spacing out since this morning*…..'

Instead of thanking them verbally, Natsuki flashed a wide grin.

"Yeah! I wonder if Eri-chan-sensei is already at the art room? We'll be in trouble if we're late~"

"Sensei's been really enthusiastic, saying things like, 'This year for sure, let's get the gold!'"

"Wow! Miou-chan, you sound just like her~"

With the tapping of their footsteps against the tile, the three of them went out into the hallway.

The reason for their slight busyness was the art contest after summer vacation.

Ever since the school had been established, there had never been a year where Sakuragaoka High's Art Club hadn't won a medal.

However, the club activities were far from being like Sparta.

Rather than encouraging techniques on how to win, the club advisor, Matsukawa-sensei, always made sure to give advice on sticking close to your original idea. Natsuki felt that she was trying to maintain a purely enjoyable creative environment.

In the club, the president, Akari, and the vice president, Miou, demonstrated a considerable amount of talent.

The previous president and vice president had chosen successors, but because Akari and Miou had so much past recognition for their artwork, there had been an unanimous decision to appoint them instead.

On the other hand, there were many members that didn't have any interest in painting, ceramics, sculpture, or things like that. Because there wasn't a Manga Club at the school, a lot of students joined just because they wanted to draw illustrations or comics.

Since those types usually worked at home, most of them were like ghost members.

Natsuki attended club meetings often, but as for her position, it was probably in the grey area.

She liked drawing comics, but she also liked painting on a huge canvas, too.

They were both different in their own way, and if someone were to ask her which she liked better, she wouldn't be able to answer. It was like trying to weigh her preference of red bean paste and whipped cream on a scale.

'I like both, so I want to do both. I thought that was fine, but…..'

To be honest, lately she worried about what her place in the club was.

She wasn't like Akari and Miou. In the end, wasn't she only half-baked compared to them?

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

There were only a few first-years and second-years in the art room.

In the corner of the blackboard, there was a scrawled message reading, "I'll

be on a business trip today. See you tomorrow," and Miou's shoulders slumped upon seeing it.

"Too bad Sensei isn't here today…. I wanted to ask her opinion on some colors."

"Miou-chan, looks like you're finally making some good progress,"

Akari peered over at the canvas set up on the easel and commented in admiration.

"Since I went with a bigger canvas this time, I still need to add more to it. What about you, Akari-chan…?"

Miou paused in setting up her paints and looked over to see what Akari was doing. Just like yesterday, she only had a sketchbook, pencil, and eraser arranged in front of her.

Akari shrugged her shoulders and forced out a laugh.

"Well, I still haven't come up with a good idea yet…"

"You're fast at working once you have the sketch done, so it'll be just fine."

'…… *I wish I had talent like those two*.'

Natsuki sat at a desk with her cheek cupped in her hand, and merely spaced out listening to her friends' conversation.

Although she was exhibiting something for the contest as well, her canvas and even her sketchbook were still completely blank.

She knew that the diligent Miou, and the creative Akari, too, already had numerous rough drawings done in their sketchbooks.

Natsuki was the only one that truly couldn't come up with anything.

"By the way, Nacchan, did you manage to tell Setoguchi-kun yesterday?"

Natsuki's shoulders shook a bit at Akari's sudden question.

"Ah, actually, I wanted to ask about that too. But I didn't think it'd be a good idea to bring it up in the classroom,"

Miou's brush stopped moving, and she shyly joined the conversation as well.

“It’s nice to be in the same class as the guy you like, but at the same time it’s so inconvenient~”

She suddenly felt embarrassed to suddenly be talking about her crush so openly.

Natsuki felt her face grow hot, but when she remembered what had happened yesterday, it immediately cooled down.

“Arghh~~…… Let me tell you all about that~”

“What is it? Do tell.”

Akari also changed her voice to play along with Natsuki’s exaggerated tone. Miou couldn’t help but laugh too, and the mood became a light and relaxed one.

Natsuki recounted what had happened in a joking tone, taking away the seriousness of the situation.

She told them about how she’d confessed, but then lied about and said it was all just a rehearsal, and about how Yuu had believed her and was going to keep helping her practice.

After listening to her story, both Akari and Miou had their mouths hanging open.

“…… Confession rehearsal, huh? You’re sure done something bold again,”

Miou’s peeked out from her short bangs with round eyes and blinked them in astonishment.

Natsuki laughed loosely and continued,

“And then after that, we ate at that ramen place in front of the station on the way back! It was really good…..”

Upon hearing the phrase, “ramen place in front of the station,” Akari reacted suddenly.

Leaning against the desk, she asked with shining eyes, “Do you mean the newly opened one? Their ramen is the best! Good choice!”

“It was my treat, though….. Wait, this isn’t good at aaaall!!”

As Natsuki corrected herself and held her head in her hands, Akari nodded deeply with a serious face.

“You’re right. It would be a bit much to treat every time.”

“Akari-chan, I don’t think that’s the real problem here…..”

Natsuki calmed down at Miou’s calm and steady indication.

Clearing her throat, she started over with explaining what she had wanted to do.

“I said it was a confession rehearsal because I wanted him to start seeing me as a girl….. But since we just went slurping ramen at the counter, nothing’s changed! He’ll just say that my gender is Natsuki again!”

Unable to hold it in any longer, she wound up mostly shouting at the end.

Akari smiled brightly at Natsuki, who had stood up from her chair, crying out in agony.

“It’ll be okay. You’re cute when you stay silent, Nacchan.”

“But then that’s being too submissive, so that’s not good at all!”

“For now, let’s just calm down, okay? Come on, close your legs.”

With pale and slender fingers, Miou gently pushed Natsuki’s legs closed, which stood apart like a crab. Even at a glance, she could see that Miou took good care of her fingernails.

‘*Her hands are really like a girl’s*….’

It wasn’t only her appearance, but in terms of her personality as well, Miou was the more feminine one. She was also the one that had suggested Natsuki wear track pants under her skirt, since she often moved around so recklessly.

“And how about you and Haruki, Miou?”

Natsuki was really curious about how her close friend and her childhood friend seemed to get along quite well.

They were in different classes, and they didn’t have lessons together, either. If they ever saw each other, it was only whenever Haruki came over during the breaks to hang out with Yuu and Souta.

‘*But even still, they go home together almost every single day*.’

Natsuki had tried asking Haruki about it before, too.

Although he was usually so easygoing, he had avoided her gaze when she’d asked, and given a dodgy answer.

“It just works out that way, I guess?” He’d said.

‘*The way he answered really made it seem like he was hiding something*…..’

In the first place, Haruki was very caring and brotherly, but when it same to girls, that was where the line was drawn. He mostly hung out with guys, and the only exception to that was his childhood friend, Natsuki.

He’d said that he and Miou had things in common to talk about it, but that couldn’t be the only reason.

Miou, too, couldn’t seem to calm down once her relationship with Haruki was brought up.

“Huh!? I-I… Things are going normally!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

As Natsuki quickly pried for more answers, Miou’s face turned bright red.

“It means what it means! So, what about you, Akari-chan?”

Miou’s voice shook as she plainly changed the subject around.

“Huh?”

Akari blushed and her eyes widened, but she soon took on a cheerful tone and said,

“Oh, don’t worry about me right now. More importantly, we’ve gotta think about Nacchan’s confession strategy!”

As if she’d said it too early, Akari quickly took her pencil and scrawled something on a blank page in her sketchbook.

Seeing the words, “Confession Strategy Part 2,” Natsuki felt an itch at the back of her nose.

“Akari-chan, thank youuuu. I won’t give up……”

“Yuki-chan~! We’ll help out too, okay?”

“Should we pull out the weeds?”

As if to interrupt Natsuki’s declaration of resolve, they suddenly heard shrill voices coming from the window.

Wondering what it could be, all three glanced at each other, and then hurried over to the window.

“Those were some pretty loud screams. Is it a celebrity or something? Are they filming here?”

Looking outside uncertainly, they saw a crowd of people in front of the flowerbeds.

And in the center of the circle of girls was—

“Isn’t that Ayase-kun? He sure is popular…”

“He looks completely different after cutting his hair.”

Both Akari and Miou were honestly surprised with the transformation of their classmate, Ayase Koyuki.

It was normal for someone to attract so much attention after daringly changing their looks, but since he had a timid personality, he seemed to be having some difficulties adapting. Despite being in the same class, they rarely ever heard him talk, so it was to be expected.

‘*When I first met Akari, too, it was actually pretty awkward, but she turned out to be really nice and never stops smiling*…’

As for Miou, she didn’t talk with guys much, other than Haruki. When she was with Natsuki, she would sometimes get to talk with Yuu and Souta, too, but she wasn’t the type to start conversations on her own.

‘*Even though Koyuki-kun’s such a nice guy…. What a waste*!’

For Natsuki, who lent and borrowed manga from him, the situation was a downright frustrating one.

That’s why she would always get heated up when talking about him.

“‘After cutting his long hair and changing his glasses to contacts, he’s actually

really cool-looking!' You don't even see that kind of thing in shoujo manga lately anymore. Koyuki-kun sure is amazing!"

"Nacchan, so that's that part you're impressed about?"

As Miou smiled wryly, Akari added on,

"Come to think of it, you exchange manga, right? Since you sit close to each other in class, too, did he talk to you about it?"

Because of her own quiet demeanor, Akari spent a lot of time watching others around her.

While she was impressed by her classmate suddenly being in the spotlight, Natsuki also started to talk about the troubles that he'd had to go through because of it,

"Koyuki-kun's really nice, and he's a good person. So even though he's been pressured into joining clubs, he's actually really worried about how to turn down those invitations without hurting anyone's feelings."

"….. That seems complicated."

Miou had actually delayed her own reply while she'd been weighing various options.

Unable to come up with an idea either, Natsuki furrowed her brows and nodded in agreement.

"Anyway, why did Ayase-kun decide to cut his hair all of a sudden? Did he want to change his personality before the last summer vacation of high school?"

As usual, Natsuki just laughed at how naturally and straightforward Akari said things.

Miou was the only one that seemed bothered by something, and muttered quietly,

"…. I wonder if that's really the only reason why."

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Yuu averted his gaze from the whiteboard that was covered in questions and

tasks, and stared up at the ceiling.

The topic at hand was their graduation project, and also their new movie.

Why did the heroine decide to confess to the protagonist?

In the first place, why had she fallen in love with him?

Although these red-circled sentences were about events in the movie, they stabbed mercilessly into his heart.

Since yesterday, he hadn't been able to get Natsuki's "confession" out of his head.

'*A confession rehearsal… Of all people, why am I her practice partner*?'

The fact that there was a rehearsal meant that there would be a real confession.

And this meant that Yuu, who had been chosen as the practice partner instead, wasn't a favored candidate.

Taking a thinking pose, he glanced at the faces of the others seated at the table.

'*Although, the only other guys I ever see Natsuki hang around would be them*…..'

Serizawa Haruki, Mochizuki Souta, and the only girl in their group, Enomoto Natsuki. They'd known each other since before they'd even started taking notice of the opposite sex, and even now, they continued to acknowledge that they were childhood friends.

He had no complaints about that, and even after they'd entered high school, they hadn't tried to put distance in their relationships or anything. So to suddenly act distant now would make things uncomfortable.

And besides that, their familiarity with each other was a double-edged blade.

Up until now, Yuu had always teased her (half intended as a joke, half out of embarrassment) about her gender simply being "Natsuki."

But now that was all coming back to him. Because they both took each other

for granted so much, wouldn't Natsuki have also started to see his gender simply as "Yuu"?

At the very least, the fact that she'd chosen him as a practice partner meant that she saw him as a male, but that also meant that she hadn't considered him at all for a love interest.

'*Who knew that the graduation of your childhood friend would bring all this*…..'

As he let out an unconscious sigh, Souta, who was good of hearing, responded,

"Yuu, you're actually taking this pretty seriously, huh? You don't have to think so hard about it, you know."

He felt a chill run up his spine, as if Souta had known that he was thinking about Natsuki just now.

When he saw the whiteboard in front of him, he remembered that they'd been discussing about the movie. Praying that his restlessness wouldn't be given away, Yuu slowly opened his mouth,

"….. Well, I think that the heroine needs to have a proper mindset, right? So it'd be a good idea to work that out."

"That's true but, Yuu, you're basically more of a variety person, aren't you?"

There was some truth in what Souta was saying.

Yuu loved big Hollywood films and comedy movies, but when it came to romance movies, none came to mind.

On the other hand, Souta watched movies of many different genres, and loved romance movies, in particular. He was the type to collect the screenplays and DVDs of his favorite works.

Haruki was different from both of them. He liked to watch edgy films that showed in independent cinemas. Out of the three of them, he was actually the one that went to the theaters the most.

When they'd first gone to their adviser saying that the three of them would be making a movie, the first thing he'd expressed was his doubts, wondering if

they'd really been able to do it. He'd laughed at their serious tone, but they understood where he was coming from.

Truthfully, they'd had difficulty deciding on a theme.

In the end, Haruki had been the voice of authority and decided that they'd go with a love story.

"I've never filmed one before, but why not give it a shot?"

Even Yuu, who had been against Souta's idea at first, found it hard to disagree after having Haruki tell him that.

For starters, their motivation to make the Film Club in the first place was because they'd been so taken by his talent.

It all started two years ago, in the fall of their first year in high school.

The short film that Haruki had secretly released on the internet had quickly spread amongst the students during the summer break. And after some critics had caught rumors of it and published blog and magazine articles about it, it got the attention of even more people.

'*He did say before that making movies was one of his hobbies*.'

If might have just been to hide their embarrassment, but after seeing the flm, Yuu and Souta became desperate about getting Haruki to make the next one. They'd fallen in love with Haruki's film.

The club that they'd made on a whim, too, was promoted to an official club after lower classmen started joining the following year. With the environment around Haruki improving so rapidly, he started making movies with even more enthusiasm.

'*He's popular amongst the girls, so maybe even Natsuki is*….'

He glanced over at Haruki, who sat in front of him.

Haruki was different from his usual calm, lion-like self, and instead sat silently with his arms crossed, giving off a nervous and tense air.

While he had probably overheard Yuu and Souta's conversation, he hadn't moved an inch.

‘*He sure is focused…. Wonder what he’s thinking about*.’

As if aware of Yuu’s staring, Haruki turned towards him.

‘*No, he’s not looking at me but….*’

Haruki stared straight at the whiteboard and seemed to be mumbling something to himself.

A moment later, he jumped up from his seat, and his chair fell over with a splendid sound.

“I’ve got it! What we need is a picture!”

Yuu and Souta both tilted their heads at Haruki’s sudden outburst.

“Wait, where would we use that?”

“What kind of picture do you mean?”

Haruki had a habit of exclaiming his ideas without further elaboration, often leaving everyone else confused. Even for these two, who were used to it by now, it was extremely difficult to figure out what he was thinking.

Instead of answering their questions, Haruki only clicked his tongue in annoyance.

“Why didn’t I think of this? With all these resources we have, there couldn’t have been any other answer.”

He seemed to be getting annoyed all on his own, and slapped his forehead with a sigh.

Although he was speaking dramatically, both Yuu and Souta knew that he could just naturally come up with ideas without needing to calculate anything. In this way, he could focus all of his time and effort into actually making the movie.

‘*This guy’s really something*…..’

Having been too overwhelmed to move at first, Yuu then picked up a memo pad to jot down the idea before they forgot them.

“We’re going to have the heroine paint the picture, right? So we’ll need someone from the Art Club now, instead of the Drama Club.”

“Yeah, someone that can only be honest within the canvas.”

As he listened to Haruki talk as if he knew this fictional character in reality, his hand with the ball pen stopped moving. It looked like the heroine had already started to come to life inside his head.

“Then we’ll have to include the canvas in the first scene. It might be completely white at the beginning, but as she spends more and more time with the protagonist, it becomes more vivid.”

“Yeah, yeah! Rather than using a bunch of crappy lines, it’d leave more of an impact if we focus on the visuals. I think the audience would be able to relate with it a lot easier, too.”

‘*Even Mochita gets really lively when we start talking about things like this*…’

Yuu felt impressed as he quickly summarized what the two of them were saying.

Before, he’d been impatient because it felt like they were just flaunting their talent.

But after realizing that he didn’t have passion or talent like them, those gloomy feelings faded a bit. They hadn’t completely vanished, but he’d mastered how to cope with them.

Just like when they’d used to play at the secret hideout, they didn’t have to compete over every little thing.

It was enough to acknowledge that he was jealous.

If not, he’d start to think of it as real envy, and then it would be over.

“—The ideas are all looking good, so next is how we’re actually going to get the pictures.”

By the time he’d noticed, Haruki and Souta had run out of ammo for their ideas.

‘*We’ll add in the parts we missed when we put it all down on paper later*.’

As he thought about their upcoming tasks, most of it was concerning how

they'd produce the pictures.

Among the underclassmen, there was a skilled guy that was an expert at making props and things. But the other two hadn't even mentioned him probably because they didn't think his style matched the one they were going for.

'*We probably want someone that's more like… 'Look, I'm a girl in love'!*'

At that moment, Natsuki's face suddenly came to mind.

Although it had only been for practice, Natsuki who had confessed yesterday was, without a doubt, "a girl in love."

So much that she almost seemed like a completely different person.

"….. We could ask Natsuki, or someone else in the Art Club, couldn't we?"

The other two looked up in astonishment at Yuu's utterance.

And then, they shouted at the same time, "That's it!"

"Just as I'd expect for you, Yuu. The ideas of someone with connections are really something else."

"You have connections with her too, don't you? It's just Natsuki."

"Uh, that's not exactly what I meant… Anyway, did you even hear what I said? I meant that people that are outgoing and know a lot of people already have things set out for them to begin with."

He got the gist of what Haruki wanted to say, but it was a little embarrassing to actually accept those words.

Just as he was hestitating on how to react, Souta spoke up with a light laugh,

"So, it's like he'll always have someone to rely on?"

"Doesn't that make it seem like he's always leaving it to other people?"

"But relying on others also means that others can rely on you, too. After all, people that try to do everything on their own are hard to approach, right?"

This time, Yuu couldn't help but hang his head at those straightforward words.

Both Haruki and Souta nodded together in agreement, "Yeah, that's Yuu's special quality."

'*G-give me a break already….*'

He had to change the subject, or he was going to die in a fit of anger.

Without any particular plan in mind, Yuu immediately opened his mouth, and at that moment, there was a knock at the door.

'*Good timing…..!*'

He started to get up to answer it, but stopped short when he guessed who it might be.

Souta looked at this watch, and also seemed to remember who the visitor would be.

"Looks like someone's here to pick you up,"

When Souta smiled knowingly at him, Haruki's face turned to an unpleasant one.

'*Mochita's pretty uptight today, too…*'

As if Yuu's shrug acted as the signal, Haruki jabbed Souta in the forehead.

"Ouch!"

"I'll ask her about it our way home."

After completely ignoring Souta, Haruki slung his bag over his shoulder and headed for the door.

Ker-chak, thunk.

The door that didn't fit properly opened with its usual racket.

When they glanced over, they saw Aida Miou waiting there like Hachiko, the faithful dog.

"…. Take care,"

Yuu called after Haruki, who seemed happy somehow, and he waved back over his shoulder.

When the door shut again with another series of loud noises, Souta slumped

down on the desk in exhaustion.

“I bet he’d never let Aida open that door herself,”

Souta mumbled this in amazement, and realizing the same thing, Yuu nodded.

“It’s not like girls wouldn’t be able to open it, but it *is* pretty heavy.”

“Haruki’s a real gentleman when it comes to those things.”

“….. Are those two going out?”

“Beats me…”

Still being all friendly with the desk, Souta mumbled a dismissive answer.

‘*That’s weird. Mochita’s usually the first to bite when it comes to these things*.’

Before he could try to ask what was wrong, Souta spoke up,

“Yuu~… Have you ever heard about ‘a single love continuing for a long time?’”

“Uh, love?”

Yuu could only blink in confusion at the sudden and unexpected question.

As if he hadn’t expected an answer in the first place, Souta said the correct answer himself,

“They mean ‘unrequited love’…..”

Unrequited love.

As he repeated the word silently to himself, his heart hurt as if something had grabbed it.

And with that pain, he became aware of his feelings for Natsuki.

‘….. *If it’s unrequited, it makes sense that it’d continue for a long time*.’

Even if she confessed, it wasn’t guaranteed that they’d get together.

And even if they did return each other’s feelings, who knew how long it would last.

‘*I think I read in some book somewhere that couples usually only last for three months, and for married couples, it’s three years*.’

It was said that the chemicals in your brain that affected romance ran out after about that long. Of course, it seemed to vary from case to case, but he did find it strangely convincing in a way.

In the case of unrequited love, that was something you had to prepare yourself for.

You could continue liking the person, or you could end it at your own timing.

‘*It’s a little sad, but it’s one way of dealing with it*….’

Souta probably felt the same.

Yuu hadn’t asked him about when it’d started, but he also had some one-sided feelings for someone.

Souta’s crush was Hayasaka Akari, who was also close friends with Natsuki and Miou.

So although they had countless opportunities to talk, for some reason, Souta would always clam up in front of her.

When asked about it, he’d say things like, “Akarin… she’s too cute…. So nervous… I can’t do it……”

Haruki and Yuu couldn’t help but laugh at how obvious he was being, but since Hayasaka was a bit of an airhead herself, she didn’t seem to notice anything either.

‘*I feel like Hayasaka can also be kind of weird sometimes*…’

Her record of boasting several awards as the president of the Art Club probably had something to do with it, but peoples’ general impression of her was something like, “I don’t really get her, but she’s kind of amazing.” Maybe it was her extraordinary talent, or how she did daring things every so often, but something about her was a lot like Haruki, too.

Among the guys, she was said to be basically “a really cute girl when she’s silent,” but he’d heard that there were more than a few guys that secretly had their eyes set on her.

From what he'd heard from Natsuki, though, her stance was more like, "Friendship over love! Art!"

"….. Did something happen with you and Hayasaka?"

He'd meant to just ask what was going on, but these words seemed to make Souta sink even lower.

There was a dull sound as his cheek dropped down on the desk, and then his hollow voice as he said,

"Yeah… It'd be nice if something happened……"

"Yeah, okay, I get what you mean, so you don't need to say any more…"

Patting Souta on the shoulder, he stood up from his seat to start getting ready to go home.

As he faced the open window, lively voices streamed in through it.

"Geez, is Ayase going to be okay…..?"

"Huh? What's wrong with Yukki?"

Souta pulled himself to his feet and joined Yuu at the window.

Yuu made some space for him, and then pointed outside, "There."

It took his eyes a moment to focus, but once he saw it, Souta was taken aback.

"Dang, he's surrounded by girls…. They're not from his club or anything, right?"

"Hm? Isn't he in the Going-Home Club?"

"No, he ended up joining the Gardening Club a while back."

"Huh…. I guess he's got it easy for him if he can even score high in the National Mock Exams."

It was only afterwards that he realized he'd said something rude.

His tone hadn't been a pleasant one, and his choice of words didn't sound too nice.

He stole an anxious glance at Souta to see if he'd noticed, and with his luck,

their eyes ended up meeting.

“That’s unusual, for you to say something like that. Are you worried because he and Natsuki get along?”

“That’s not it!”

Blurting that out in reflex, Yuu was taken by an increasingly stronger impulse to hold his head in his hands.

Souta just couldn’t help but laugh at his friend’s all-too-obvious actions.

He hadn’t talked with Ayase Koyuki all that much, but he knew that he and Natsuki shared the same taste in manga.

Because of his sister, Hina, and Natsuki’s influence, Yuu read a lot of manga as well, but when it came to magazine features, publishers, and deep conversations, he was at a total loss. Koyuki seemed to be left out of the loop often, and whenever Natsuki went up to talk to him, he always gave them as much space as possible.

‘*It’s not like he’s a bad guy or anything, but there’s just something that gets to me*….’

Standing beside Yuu, who was staring in careful observation, Souta squinted his eyes against the bright sunlight outside.

“Whatever the reason is, it’s amazing he could completely transform himself like that,”

As he said this, Souta used the ledge of the window to rest his chin in his hand.

Although his eyes seemed to be focused on Koyuki, he was probably thinking about something else.

“I personally think that you’re fine the way you are, Mochita,”

Yuu said, and as if making an escape, went back to the desks to get his bag.

Souta seemed shocked, and immediately shouted after him,

“Wait, Yuu, say that one more time!”

“Say what? Sure you weren’t just hearing things? Hey, take care of the

window and curtains, would you?”

“Yuu, you don’t have to get so embarrassed about it!”

“…… Have you forgotten that I’m the club president, and therefore I have the key for this room?”

“Wahh, alright, I’m coming! So please don’t lock me in hereeee!”

Yuu laughed inwardly to himself, realizing that he was acting pretty stupid.

But it was also true that this kind of mood wasn’t a bad thing, either.

It was harder than he imagined to keep dealing with how hopeless he was when it came to talent or love.

‘*But it’s not like I can just give up, so it’s useless either way*…..’

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 2)

Here’s the second chapter of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks’ “**(Confession**

Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu“!

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

←Chapter 1 | Chapter 3→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

———

Setoguchi Yuu

Birthday: July 11
Horoscope Sign: Cancer
Blood Type: AB

Natsuki’s childhood friend. In the Film Research Club. A nice person, and popular in class. Has a younger sister.

—

practice 2

The second day after the confession rehearsal, Natsuki stared at the calendar in her room.

‘*What do I do? No matter how many times I check, it’s Saturday*…..’

She knew that she was just kidding herself. Of course she was completely aware of what day it was. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have been drawing comics until morning, and she hadn’t panicked at all even when waking up well into the afternoon.

But when confronting it anew like this, she couldn’t help but worry.

Rehearsal or not, it was the first weekend after she’d confessed.

Pulling back the curtains, she could see Yuu’s room on the second floor of the house next door.

Since they lived right next to each other, and their mothers were good friends, they often went to each other’s house since they were young.

This continued even after they entered high school, and it had become a habit to hang out together during the weekend at either of their houses. Natsuki always went over under the pretext of asking Yuu to help her study.

‘*It wouldn’t be like me to say something like, “I came over because I wanted to see you*,”’

Natsuki sighed, and picked up the math worksheet sitting on the edge of her desk.

“Oh well, I guess I’ll go over.”

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Even though she’d come all fired up, unfortunately, Yuu wasn’t home.

With mixed feelings of relief and disappointment, Natsuki forced a laugh.

“I see…. I guess I’ll just head home for today, then.”

“Ehh—? I think he should be back soon, so let’s play games while we wait,”

The girl that said this while pouting was Yuu’s little sister, Hina.

She was in the same grade as Natsuki’s little brother, a first year in high school, but she was much cuter simply for being a girl. Her kitten-like playfulness immediately lifted up her dented mood.

“Sure. Wanna do leveling? Or battle mode?”

“Both!”

When Hina smiled innocently, she felt just a bit nervous.

Each time she smiled happily with her drooping eyes, Yuu’s face would come to mind.

‘*Since they’re siblings, it’s only natural that they’d look alike, but*…..’

It wasn’t just their physical characteristics; they had other things in common, as well.

“Nacchan, something happened between you and my brother.”

Hina was in the middle of letting herself into Yuu’s room when she suddenly turned to Natsuki.

Natsuki, who had been following behind her, was taken by surprise with the sudden question.

‘*Unless I was just imagining it, she said that as a statement, and not a question, right!?*’

The way that Hina looked straight at her with convinced eyes made her uncomfortable.

“Does that reaction mean I’m right?”

“Uh, um, well……”

When Natsuki became flustered, Hina made a mature face.

“Hmm—? Well, if you don’t want to tell me, that’s okay, too,”

She dropped the subject unceremoniously and faced her small back in Natsuki’s direction again.

True to her word, Hina didn’t ask about it again.

As Natsuki watched her silently setting up the game system, she fidgeted restlessly.

‘*Hina-chan said that because she was worried, right*……?’

There was a possibility that she might have heard something from Yuu, as well.

No, from what she knew of her childhood friend’s personality, he probably wouldn’t have said anything about the confession rehearsal. But if even Hina was saying that something must have happened between the two of them, then that probably meant Yuu was acting differently from usual.

“……Um… hey, Hina-chan……?”

“If it’s you, then I don’t mind.”

“Eh?”

Because the context was missing, she couldn’t catch the meaning of her words right away.

Hina turned around with a controller in hand before elaborating.

“If it’s you, I don’t mind handing my brother over, Nacchan.”

Hina's eyes shone with an unusual serious gleam.

It didn't look like she was joking at all.

Natsuki straightened her back, and asked tentatively,

"What do you mean by 'handing over'……?"

"He gets all sulky really easily, and he can be pretty indecisive sometimes, but he's nice, and not bad-looking, either. Maybe I'm only saying this because I'm his sister, but I'd say he's a pretty good deal!"

"Eh……"

After realizing what Hina was getting at, Natsuki's face paled.

'*Wait, if she's telling me all of this now, then does that means she knows about my feelings for Yuu*!?'

She knew for a fact that she'd never told Hina about this before.

It was true that they got along like real sisters, but that's exactly what made it hard to say something like, "Hina-chan, y'know, I have a crush on your brother."

As Natsuki sat there, stunned, Hina said something even more shocking.

"Or is Koyuki-senpai more your type?"

"'T-*type*'…..?"

Judging by where the conversation was going, she probably meant the type of person that she liked.

In the face of this unexpected development, Natsuki could only open and close her mouth like a goldfish.

"Even all the first years are talking about how cool he's gotten. At this rate, someone's probably going to strike soon, don't you think?"

"St-strike!?"

"I mean someone might confess."

Hina smiled bitterly and shrugged her shoulders.

Once again, Natsuki was truly impressed with how she reacted so maturely.

“……Even though Koyuki-senpai’s always been really cool, and nice, too.”

Hina muttered suddenly.

It was said so quietly that Natsuki thought she might have misheard her.

While she was in the middle of deciding whether or not to ask her to repeat what she’d said, Hina spoke first,

“Hey, Nacchan.”

“I bet you’re wondering how I knew you like my brother, right?”

“Ehh!? Hina-chan, you can read minds?”

Natsuki blurted out, and Hina stifled a laugh. She dropped the controller she was holding, and then proceeded to fall down onto the floor, too.

“N-Nacchan, you’re hilarious!”

“Hina-chaaaan, stop laughing and just answer meeee!”

Natsuki complained, nearly on the brink of crying, and seeming to feel sorry for her, Hina wobbled back on her feet.

While wiping the tears from the corners of her eyes, she began to explain everything.

“Since you’re so honest, it’s obvious just by looking at you.”

“R-really? Then….Does that mean that even Yuu……”

“I don’t think so. My brother’s pretty dull when it comes to noticing what others think about him, after all.”
In contrast, Hina was blunt as she made this sharp assessment.

Now that she’d mentioned it, things started to fit together in Natsuki’s mind.

Yuu had a habit of prioritizing other people before himself; it was practically natural for him.

Maybe it was because he couldn’t get out of his “big brother” role, even when he wasn’t at home. At a glance, Haruki, being the bullying type, acted much more like an older brother, but it was actually Yuu that made sure things got done whenever it came to club activities and such.

Even when it was a sensitive atmosphere, just like Hina had pointed out, he could be insensitive about how others felt about him.

'*Is it because I'm also an older sibling that I just can't leave him alone?*'

Falling into deep thought, she then noticed that she was being stared at.

Glancing over, she held her breath and met eyes with Hina, who was looking straight at her. Despite all that was said, she probably wanted to know Natsuki's reaction.

"…. Hina-chan, you sure talk all grown-up."

"Don't I~? After all, I'm in high school now!"

The way she threw out her chest proudly was cute, no question about it, and unable to take it, Natsuki hugged her tightly.

"Gosh! Hina-chan, you're just so cuuuute!"

"Nacchan, that tickles~"

As their cheerful voices echoed around the room, the door suddenly opened without so much as a knock.

There was only one person who could do something like that.

"Just what're you two doing in someone else's room……"

There stood the owner of the room, Yuu, with an amazed look on his face.

"Onii-chan! Welcome home!"

Following Hina's lead, Natsuki also waved at him.

"Welcome back~ You're so late! Where've you been?"

"Does it really matter?'

Skillfully maneuvering his way past the two seated on the floor, he headed for the desk in the back of the room.

In his hand, he held a shopping bag from the large bookstore a station away. It was a bit too thick to be a magazine, so he had probably bought another new reference book.

'*Now that I think about it, his mom did say that he was going to take summer*

classes.'

Natsuki had overheard that when her mom and Yuu's mom had been chatting in their living room, the day after her younger brother, who was still a first year in high school, had boasted about going to summer camp. Although Yuu rarely showed that studious side in front of her for some reason, he seemed to take studying for the entrance exams pretty seriously.

"Is it really okay for you to be wasting time over here on a weekend?"

As he put down the paper bag and his wallet on the desk, Yuu asked this in a joking manner.

Natsuki tilted her head in confusion at the sudden question.

"But you're a special exception. And anyway, don't I always come over on weekends anyway?"

"……Whatever you say,"

As if embarrassed by his own question, Yuu's reply came out as a mumble.

From the side, his face looked a bit red, but that might've just been because he'd just come in from the cold outdoors. Natsuki decided against pointing it out, and just laughed a bit in response.

"So, what'd you come here for today?"

Yuu turned around again, and asked this while standing in an imposing stance.

"I was thinking you could maybe help me with my homework,"

As Natsuki laughed awkwardly, both Yuu and Hina sounded surprised as they asked in unison,

"So, not for the games…"

"It wasn't for the games?"

"You guys are so in sync! No, of course not!!"

That makes it sounds like all I ever do is play games!

Those words of protest made it up to her throat, but she worried the reply would just be something plain, like "Yeah," so she decided to keep it to herself.

But when she really thought about it, she had a feeling that half the time she came over to Yuu's room, she was always holding a game controller, rather than any kind of writing utensil.

'*In that case, I'll just have to prove it to him…!*'

Natsuki held up the math worksheet that lay completely forgotten, and thrust it towards him like evidence.

"Look! There's only one problem done, see?"

"Well, don't brag about it. What am I, some kind of refuge?"

Laughing wryly, Yuu reached for the folding table. Regardless of what he said, it looked like he was willing her help her again today, too.

Natsuki picked up her school supplies, and Hina also stood up to make room.

"Well, I'll leave you two alone now,"

Hina smiled impishly, and Natsuki felt an inward chill.

'*Wah! If she words it like that, Yuu's going to notice something for sure*…..'

She glanced timidly at Yuu, but unlike what she had expected, he was grinning widely.

"Don't you want to do homework with us, too?"

"….Onii-chan, at this rate, you're going to struggle for life."

"Hah? Is that supposed to be a prophecy?"

Unable to disagree with what Hina meant, Natsuki could only let out a dry laugh.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

After an hour passed, there was only one problem left on the worksheet.

She'd thought that it might take all afternoon, but as usual, Yuu was a good teacher. Even Natsuki, who was really quite bad at math, could find the correct answer, as if by magic.

'*He must study much more than normal… Yuu's probably going to university at this rate, huh…*'

Natsuki was also studying her hardest to get into a vocational school, but having good grades from high school was essential. Since she had a younger brother to be a model for, she was aiming to become an honor student from the recommendation entrance exam.

Yuu had also said that he was aiming for a public university for the same reason.

Whether it was a private school or a public school, he said he wanted leave the options open for Hina.

'*Even though we've never talked, or even thought about that sort of this before then*…'

Still, the topic about their career paths had inevitably come up.

The underclassman that had confessed to Yuu, too, must have been pressured by the fact that they wouldn't be able to see each other anymore once spring graduation came. They would only be able to see each other in person every day while they were still in high school.

"……By the way, did you hear about that thing on Monday?"

Yuu must have noticed that Natsuki had lost concentration, and broke the silence by asking this.

Natsuki shrugged at the worksheet that she'd stopped writing on completely, and put down her mechanical pencil.

"You mean about wanting us to meet at the Film Club? I got the text from Miou, about how you're looking for someone to draw for a new movie or something."

As they started speaking again, Natsuki felt her mood plummet.

Natsuki liked Haruki's movies as well, and had helped him out with props a number of times in the past.

However, this time, it seemed like they were looking for something on a much larger scale.

"……I wonder if I should even go to the meeting at all…"

“Hm? Are you not feeling well?”

“No, that’s not why….. You guys are looking for a picture that’ll be like a key for your movie, right? In that case, I feel like Miou and Akari would be more capable of drawing one,”

Natsuki forced out these words for the sake of preserving the quality of the work, but Yuu didn’t seem satisfied, and merely tilted his head.

“It’s true that Hayasaka and Aida draw really well, but we’re not professionals, so we don’t really know much about technique or artistic values. We just want a picture that fits the image of the heroine, that’s all.”

Although he sounded calm as he said this, Yuu’s words weighed heavily on her.

Natsuki didn’t argue it any further and just mumbled a quiet, “I see…..” in response.

“And anyway, I like your drawings.”

“……Eh?”

“When you draw people, they look really expressive, and when you draw backgrounds, they kind of sparkle, you know? I think it’s nice. Just looking at them cheers you up.”

“F-flattery isn’t going to get you anywhere.”

“Come on, don’t be modest. I wouldn’t just be flattering you starting now, after all this time we’ve known each other already~”

Seeing how easily Yuu laughed about it, Natsuki bit down on her bottom lip and looked down.

If she didn’t do that, she felt like she might start crying.

‘*He says that to me so easily, even though he can be insensitive, but still acts nice around anyone*…..’

It was always Yuu’s words that gave her confidence.

Even when Natsuki couldn’t see her own good points, Yuu would see them for her. And he would word it all so nicely, and compliment her.

“You draw comics, right? Don’t just show them to Hina. Let me read them too

sometime.”

Before she could even thank him for his previous compliments, Yuu said something shocking.

Nodding without really meaning it, Natsuki lost the timing to look back up again.

‘*I’m happy that he complimented me on my drawings, but showing him my comics is kind of*…..’

If she wanted to go professional, it would be good idea to start showing her comics to people around her.

Thanks to the help of some friends she’d made on the internet, Natsuki had been able to summon the courage to show them to Hina, Miou, and Akari, among a few others. While at times the feedback could be harsh, they didn’t mean to discourage her, but tell her how she could improve.

However, if she were to show them to Yuu, it would be a completely different story.

Part of the reason was because the comic she was drawing was shoujo, but it was also because the hero clearly resembled a certain “someone.” And even if he didn’t notice that, Natsuki still wouldn’t be able to stand it.

“……I’ll give it some thought,”

Natsuki somehow managed to reply. Yuu smiled and answered back,

“Let me know as soon as possible.”

As expected, a guy that could read the atmosphere was something else.

‘*He’s so considerate when it comes to these things, though*…..’

As she looked at Yuu smiling in that big brother-like way, Natsuki felt like testing the waters a bit.

She took a small breath to disguise her feelings, and asked casually,

“Hey. If… If I happen to get a boyfriend, what would you do?”

“Well, this is random. Does this have something to do with your comic?”

“Who knows?”

Natsuki forced a grin, and Yuu sighed as if it couldn’t be helped.

“Well….. As your rehearsal partner, I’d have to cheer you on, right?”

“……nn”

She knew it was her own fault. Because she’d made it sound like she had someone else.

Despite this, Natsuki was so shocked that she couldn’t breathe right.

Yuu didn’t seem to think much of Natsuki’s silence, and started to read the reference book he’d bought.

“If it’s you, I don’t mind handing my brother over, Nacchan.”

Hina’s words repeated in her head, and Natsuki answered back mentally.

That it was impossible for her.

But still, being unable to give up, Natsuki said to Yuu, who wasn’t looking this way anymore,

“Thank you. It’s reassuring to know you’ll be there for me.”

As if surprised by the late reply, Yuu paused in turning the page of his book.

“…..Do your best.”

Even though he didn’t take his eyes off the reference book, Yuu’s face was kind.

“I will!”

Natsuki answered cheerfully this time, and pretended not to hear her heart crying out in pain.

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 3)

Here’s the third chapter of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks’ “**(Confession**

Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu“!

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

←Chapter 2 | Chapter 4→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

——

Ayase Koyuki Birthday: August 28
Horoscope Sign: Virgo
Blood Type: A
Natsuki’s classmate. In the Gardening Club. He’s changed his appearance and personality a lot recently, making him the topic of talk amongst the girls.

—

practice 3 It was a blazing hot day at the beginning of the following week, as well.

Even just from walking down the corridor, beads of sweat formed at the back of Natsuki’s neck.

‘They shouldn’t only turn on the air conditioning for the faculty room, but the rest of the school, too…..’

The mere memory of the paradise she’d been in moments ago was enough to take her away from reality.

Although she’d been fine with both the heat and the cold when she was younger, she couldn’t handle the extremes of either at all now.

“Ah, it’s a jet stream!”

Akari, who was walking in front, pointed at the sky and turned around.

“Wow! Pretty…..”

Hearing Miou’s exclamation, Natsuki was the last one to look up, squinting her eyes against the brightness.

“With the sky this blue, you can see it really clearly, huh?”

“Right? Don’t you think it looks like a line left by a giant white brush?”

“…Yeah.”

In contrast with Miou and Akari’s excited voices, she answered in a dull monotone.

‘Crap, I did it again…..’

Feeling their gaze shift from the clouds to her, she quickly spoke up in a more cheerful voice.

“It’s almost time. If we don’t hurry, Haruki’s going to have a fit!”

Natsuki said, and took off in a light run towards the art room.

Hearing the footsteps of the others following behind her, she let out a sigh.

She’d been acting like this since that morning.

What Yuu had said about “cheering her on” would suddenly come to mind, dulling her emotions.

‘I know I shouldn’t let it bother me so much, but….’

Just like how humans aren’t able to control the weather by will, handling emotions could be just as difficult.

‘The meeting’s going to start soon, so I have to get it together….’

She slapped both of her cheeks, and putting on a determined face, went to open the door of the preparation room next to the art room.

Their adviser, Matsukawa-sensei, had let them use it exclusively so that they wouldn’t disrupt the other club members.

‘I didn’t think she’d be too approving of it, so that was surprising.’

Before coming here, she had gone to the faculty room to report the request from the Film Club.

While it was her job as the adviser of the Art Club to suggest they focus on the contest right now, Matsukawa-sensei had also expressed her support for their collaboration with the Film Club.

‘Is it because it’s better the more exposure our work gets…?’

Of course, she was happy that others would want to see her work, but unlike Akari and Miou, who regularly won awards, it was still a challenge for Natsuki, who lacked the confidence that they had.

But despite all that, the reason that she’d decide to hear the Film Club’s request was because she couldn’t get what Yuu had said yesterday out of her head.

“I like your drawings.”

Yuu hadn’t said that he liked *her*, but the drawings that she drew.

Even still, she had been genuinely happy.

That was why she had decided to attend the meeting, even though she knew she probably wouldn’t be picked.

Yuu and the others were already waiting out in the hall, and playing with a handheld fan.

“Yo. Sorry to take up your time when you’re all busy preparing for the contest.”

Even while saying these commendable words, Haruki grinned with toothy smile.

Used to his usual joking tone, Natsuki laughed and shot back at him,

“If you’re really sorry, then at least treat us to something to drink.”

“Ah, that’s right. Sorry, we should have thought of that….!”

For some reason, it was Souta, instead of Haruki, was the one who had hurried to reply.

Haruki waved his hand in the air, holding Souta back.

“Mochita, you’re such a nice guy. You don’t have to do whatever Natsuki says, you know.”

“You really are a nice person, Mochita. But it’s fine to just let Haruki take care of this kind of thing.”

It was just after Natsuki replied, having been outdone by Mochita's kind offer, when they heard Yuu cough, and then speak in a frosty tone.

"Haruki, and Natsuki, too, would you two quit it for a minute? Can't you see that you're leaving out Hayasaka and Aida?"

At Yuu's words, Natsuki saw that Miou and Akari, who had come a little later, were standing there looking a bit lost.

They seemed uncertain about when to jump into the conversation, but also generally overwhelmed by how quickly it was moving. On the other hand, it was easy for Natsuki, since she'd know Haruki since they were childhood friends.

"S-Sorry! I didn't mean you two hanging."

Natsuki unlocked the door to the preparation room, and urged Miou and Akari to go inside.

Yuu followed after them, but Haruki seemed to remember something and stopped short.

"I'm thirsty now after talking so much. Mochita, let's go."

"R-Right!"

Nodding awkwardly, Souta's face was burning bright red, possibly because of the heat. If so, it would be a good idea to go get something to rehydrate themselves, just like Haruki said.

Yuu looked like he was about to say something, but in the end, he just waved Haruki and Souta off.

"For starters, I'll give a basic explanation about the project."

Being the only one left behind, Yuu started to talk with a friendly smile on his face.

In doing so, Natsuki saw the tension leave Miou and Akari's shoulders, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

'Good, they're back to their normal selves again…'

Yuu's natural personality probably had something to do with it, but it

might've also been the impact of Natsuki confessing to them her own feelings that they seemed at ease while he talked.

'If it were me, and Miou told me that she liked Haruki, for instance… I'd be happy, too.'

There were times when he could be annoying, but she couldn't deny that he was one of her prided childhood friends.

If, by any chance, Miou and Haruki started going out, she might start feeling even more self-conscious than she did now.

By the time Yuu had finished his brief explanation, Haruki and Souta came back carrying several water bottles.

Natsuki had said it as a joke, but it seemed like he really was treating them. Taking the water bottles gratefully, Haruki, the director of this work, began to explain the kind of images they were looking for.

"The setting is that the heroine, who's never been in love before, starts showing changes in her art after meeting the protagonist. We want to appeal to the viewers by using pictures to show the delicate, and subtle changes in the heroine's feelings towards the protagonist."

Haruki seemed to have a firm vision in mind, and expressed it without faltering.

A bit overwhelmed, Natsuki turned to make eye contact with her two close friends.

They would be creating the effect he was aiming for through their art.

It was hard just to imagine how challenging that would be.

At least for Natsuki, it was rare that she could successfully convey an emotion to the viewer from a single picture. And even when she could, pulling it off with just penwork would require a great deal of skill.

Miou and Akari both had hard looks on their faces, as well, and seemed to be thinking about something.

Haruki looked at them each in turn, and then asked calmly, as if discussing the day's weather.

“Say, what color do you think love is?”

“Huh? What color…?”

His sudden question didn’t make much sense. Natsuki was about to ask him for clarification, but when faced with his piercing, straight-forward gaze, she couldn’t find the words.

“…Pink, I guess?”

Saying the first words that name to mind, Haruki gave a strong nod.

As if encouraged by that response, before long, Miou also answered,

“Love can sometimes be bitter, or painful, so I think blues and blacks would be used, too.”

Haruki nodded with interest, and lastly, looked at Akari.

“What do you think, Hayasaka?”

“I’d say… gold, I guess.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Yuu and Souta widen their eyes at Akari’s unique sense.

Miou seemed surprised, too.

Haruki was the only one whose expression turned serious. He rested his hands on the desk and leaned forward in interest.

“What makes you think that?”

“It pretty, and shiny, but it rusts when you leave it alone for too long, right? And when it shines too brightly, it can be blinding, so I think that’s similar to how love can be.”

It made sense, but at the same time, it didn’t. That was Natsuki’s honest opinion.

The other members seemed to also feel similarly, and were unable to come up with a response.

All except for Haruki.

“Oh…? I never thought I’d meet someone that thinks the same way as me.”

After muttering this in astonishment, Haruki laughed shyly.

He looked satisfied, like he'd just found a comrade.

'Looks like Akari's got this one.'

Natsuki glanced over at Yuu, who seemed to snap out of his daze before starting to get the meeting back in order.

"So that's the general idea… For the time being, would you mind showing us some of your actual works?"

'Hmm… just "for the time being," huh?'

Although she'd picked up on his way of phrasing it, it would probably only ruin the mood if she said anything. Instead, she pretended like she hadn't heard it, and brought a flat smile to her lips.

"We'll bring a few different things, like oil paintings, and sketches."

Although it wouldn't just be Yuu's words, maybe their impression would change once they actually looked at their work. Also, she knew that it wasn't any of her business, but she wanted Haruki to notice Miou's charm, no matter what.

Making eye contact with Miou and Akari, they both nodded, and all three of them stood up.

Once they'd brought their works from the art room, something like a screening process began.

"Now presenting the first contestant, Enomoto Natsuki!"

Before anyone could say anything, she volunteered first.

'After all, when it comes to talent, it's a showdown between Akari and Miou.'

She'd given up on getting in the way of that, and since she was starting to feel pessimistic about the whole thing, she wanted to get it over with quickly.

At least, that was what she'd thought, but surprisingly, what she heard were positive comments.

"The expressions in the characters you draw are really lively. That's the kind

of thing I like to see."

The first one to speak was Haruki.

Souta and Yuu nodded, and continued by saying things like, "The colors are nice," and "It has a good design, too."

Taken by surprise, Natsuki was slow in reacting.

She could feel her voice shaking, but she spoke as cheerfully as she could.

"W-Wow! You all sound like real art critics making comments like that!"

As if she'd just said something funny, all three of the guys laughed a bit.

'I really wanna ask why! But, I'm also scared to know…'

Without saying another word, Haruki suddenly reached his hand out.

"It was an honest compliment, you know. It's not often that I get the chance to, after all."

He ruffled her hair playfully, and immediately, she started to feel like a puppy or a kitten being patted on the head. Even so, somewhere deep down, she felt a bit embarrassed.

"Ehh? You should praise me more on a regular basis!"

This time, Natsuki was able to make a well-timed comeback, and she did a mental victory pose.

Checking her surroundings, she saw Souta holding his stomach, doubled over in laughter.

She heard Miou and Akari laughing, too, and let out a sigh of relief.

It seemed like the tension that had formed in the room earlier had been eased.

'….Huh? Oh yeah, what about Yuu?'

"So it was Haruki, huh….."

As if to cut through her thoughts, the words Yuu muttered rang clearly in her ears.

Natsuki couldn't figure out who those words were directed at, though, or

even what he was talking about in the first place.

However, the feeling that there had been an a misunderstanding washed over her instantly.

“Um, Yuu….?”

Calling out to him hesitantly, Yuu’s shoulders shook slightly.

“….Alright, that’s enough with the flirting.”

“Huh?”

She froze in place at his words. She was used to Yuu’s jokes, but she never would have imagined him to say that she was flirting with Haruki, of all people.

‘Did it look like we were fooling around to him…?’

Since Yuu was the only really responsible one here, he must have felt that the tension, which Natsuki had personally felt to be a bit suffocating, to be necessary for the seriousness of the screening process. In that case, it would be Natsuki and Haruki’s fault for distracting everyone.

Haruki also muttered bluntly, “Crap,” and knitted his eyebrows together.

“Th-Then, next up is Aida-san.”

Noticing the tense atmosphere, Souta changed the topic. He looked at Miou’s works, which were displayed next to Natsuki’s, and commented, “They’re very delicate drawings.”

Yuu and Haruki followed suit, and once more, a peculiar tension filled the room.

‘This is probably for the best, but….’

It wasn’t that Natsuki wanted to make another commotion, so she didn’t plan on arguing with Yuu.

But, although she couldn’t put it into words, she couldn’t help but feel something bothering her.

As if she was onto something with her bad premonitions, the unexpected surprises continued.

Unlike his positive comments towards Natsuki's works earlier, Haruki's comments on Miou's works were harsh.

"Don't the expressions seem kind of stiff?"

Even Souta and Yuu seemed taken aback by Haruki's unreserved statement.

"I'd say it's more like they look very well-defined, you know?"

"Oh, there's landscapes, too."

Despite the other two's efforts to bring up the good points, Haruki had only sharp words to say.

"The technique is good and all, but… they feel more like references."

Afterwards, Haruki was mostly silent when it came to Akari's pieces.

No matter which work he looked at, he only said, "Looks nice," and then proceeded to stare at each one.

Glad that the unexpected developments had come to an end, Natsuki also fell silent and turned towards the works.

'They want to appeal to the viewers through pictures, huh…. It feels like Akari showed that she was fully capable of pulling that off…'

In the end, just as expected, Haruki chose Akari to draw the pictures.

Akari herself seemed to have lost all of her excitement, and had become completely shy. She hid behind Natsuki, and spoke to Haruki from a distance.

"Um, Serizawa-kun… Could you tell me a bit more about the movie? Otherwise, I won't fully understand the heroine's feelings, and it might be hard to convey the right mood in the pictures."

"Convey the right mood, huh… Yeah, these two things go hand-in-hand."

Although he'd left out the specifics, the gist of what Haruki meant still got across.

'Haruki probably sees Akari as a comrade.'

He was smiling just like he used to when they would play in the secret fort they built when they were younger.

As you grow older, finding someone that shares your point of view on things becomes harder. That must have been why Haruki was genuinely pleased to have met Akari, who shared a similar mindset as him when it came to creative activities.

'Then, what about Miou….?'

What did Haruki think of Miou, who went home together with him nearly every day because they had things in common?

Natsuki had the urge to ask about it right this moment, but as she thought about the feelings of her close friends, she hesitated. Besides, it wasn't something an outsider like her should be poking her nose into.

'I wonder how Miou's feeling right now….'

Looking over, Miou was beside her, smiling softly as usual.

However, both her hands and legs were shaking slightly.

"….Miou…"

Even though she wasn't sure what to say to her, she wound up saying her name out loud.

Startled, Miou looked over at Natsuki, and then hid her hands behind her back.

"…Let's start cleaning up."

As she said this with a smile, Natsuki couldn't think of anything to say after that.

She pretended not to have seen anything, and instead, shouted loudly in her head.

'Haruki, you moron!'

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

In the end, the meeting concluded in about an hour.

To Natsuki, it had felt almost twice as long, so she'd been surprised when checking the time on her watch.

‘Both Miou and Akari seem spaced out since the meeting ended…’

They’d gone back to the art room, and started working on their own art again, but they still all seemed distracted.

While they each had their own separate reasons, it was clear that the meeting earlier was the cause. In the end, her childhood friends had caused trouble, and Natsuki couldn’t help but feel bad about it.

‘They said we’d meet up again at a later date, but they really only need to see Akari from now on, right?’

Feeling unsettled, she decided to text Yuu to make sure.

Natsuki wouldn’t mind helping out, but unlike working on small props like she’d done before, this job wasn’t exactly one that could be shared. Also, whether it was Miou, or Akari, she felt like, no matter what, it’d end up awkward.

‘Somehow, things have gotten so crazy….’

“No wonder the cicadas stopped crying. It’s started raining,”

Miou muttered this so quietly, it was nearly inaudible.

She might have even just been talking to herself, rather than to anyone in particular.

Akari must have thought the same, since she didn’t reply until a little while later.

“There’s a lot of clouds, too, so it might start raining really hard for a while…”

After she’d sent the text, Natsuki looked out the window when Akari mentioned the clouds.

“You’re right. There’s so many rain clouds…. What should we do? Wanna just go home for today?”

Turning around, both of them voiced their approval. There was still a while left until dismissal time, but since none of them could focus, there wasn’t much point in staying much longer.

“Alright, then let’s get going! Ah, Miou, you’re with us today, right? We

should go home together with the three of us more often."

Speaking in a deliberate cheerful tone, Natsuki smiled at the other two.

Akari nodded lightheartedly as always, and after a while, Miou smiled, as well.

When they walked out to the school gates, just as Akari had predicted, it started to rain harder.

As if countering the sound of raindrops on their umbrellas, Natsuki let out a huge sigh.

"Geez, I'm totally worn out today~"

"It's probably mental stress. With the contest coming up, and having your work critiqued right in front of you."

Hearing Miou's response, she felt her blood run cold a bit.

Even though she'd tried to avoid bringing up Haruki, it'd been completely spoiled.

As Natsuki tried to think of how to reply, Akari spoke up first instead.

"Serizawa-kun must really think fondly of you, Miou-chan."

Not noticing that Miou had stopped in her tracks, Akari continued in her usual, somewhat leisurely tone of voice.

"I don't think there's many people that could be so straight-forward…"

"But, I felt like he was being a little… insensitive about it…. y-you know…?"

Natsuki spoke up on reflex, but feeling her own comment might've been insensitive, she hurriedly trailed off at the end. If she was trying to cover it up, maybe it would've been better to have just laughed it off.

'Was that okay….?'

Miou had started walking again, but she'd hidden her face under her umbrella.

Akari kept on walking ahead, and continued talking.

"Isn't it because he thought that Miou-chan would be able to handle it?'

“Ah….!”

Akari’s words made her realize a reason that made sense, and she raised her umbrella up.

‘Yeah, that’s right! Haruki always gives a lot of critique for the works he likes!’

Whenever the four of them watched movies on DVD together as childhood friends, Haruki always had a lot to say about the ones that he brought. Natsuki found that a bit hard to understand, but he probably couldn’t keep quiet about it *because* of the fact he liked them so much.

Putting it in Yuu and Souta’s words, he was just a tsundere.

“Haruki can kind of be a contrarian sometimes, or kind of a tsundere, you know?”

She raised her voice a little so that Miou, who was walking a little slower than them, could hear, too.

But when she didn’t reply at all, Natsuki became a bit worried and looked back at her.

“….Akari-chan, you sure observe people a lot, huh?”

As she looked at Miou smiling a little sadly, she saw something like lightning flash briefly in the sky.

‘Could it be that Miou’s jealous of Akari….?’

Miou might not be conscious out of it herself, but could she actually be feeling some jealousy?

Judging by the conversation in the preparation room, Haruki and Akari seemed to think in similar ways. And even just now, Akari has proved that she understood Haruki even more than Natsuki did as one of his childhood friends.

‘Would this count as a love triangle?’

As she tried to calm her quickening heartbeat, Natsuki looked over at Akari.

Akari realized that the other two were lagging behind, and stopped walking so that they could catch up.

“….I wonder what it’s like to be in love. Must be nice….”

Akari’s words, which were nearly drowned out altogether by the sound of the raindrops, echoed in Natsuki’s eardrums.

In contrast to her words, a shadow was cast over Akari’s expression.

‘H-Huh? Just now… Wait, then that means….’

Quickly thinking back to all their previous conversations, it was true that Akari never really talked about her own experiences with love. In fact, she always avoided the topic completely.

If Natsuki’s guess was correctly, then it wasn’t actually a love triangle at all.

‘But, doesn’t this mean that Akari might have trouble drawing the pictures for the movie…?’

“Enomoto-san!”

His voice cut through the surrounding air like thunder.

She was familiar with the voice itself, but she couldn’t remember ever hearing it so loudly. Turning around on instinct, Natsuki prepared herself for it to be someone other than who she expected.

However, the one that came running towards them was just who she’d thought it was.

“I’m glad I caught up to you…”

“Koyuki-kun! What’s up?”

“When I stopped by the art room, I heard that you’d already gone home… Um, I got this yesterday.”

Ruffling through his bag, Koyuki pulled out a small paper bag.

Natsuki took the paperbag from him when he held it out to her, and then looked back at him in confusion.

“Can I open it?”

“Of course. I want you to have it.”

Although she found that a little strange, Natsuki opened the paper bag and

looked inside.

“This is the limited booklet! Koyuki-kun, you won?!”

Inside was the limited edition booklet that had been made to commemorate the tankobon publication of the manga they were both fans of. It was a rare gem, given out to only a handful of applicants from the campaign.

“I didn’t think I’d win when I sent in an application, but it looks like I got really lucky.”

Natsuki jumped up and down a bit in excitement, and Koyuki nodded shyly.

“Wow, this is amazing! I never thought I’d get to see the real thing in person!”

Staring at the cover with interest, Natsuki let out a gleeful sigh.

“Nacchan, you seem really happy.”

“Yoshida-sensei, right? I remember you saying you were a fan.”

Akari and Miou, who were watching the exchange from the sidelines, peeked at the booklet in Natsuki’s hand with smiles of their own.

“Yep! Yoshida-sensei’s the best when it comes to gag manga!”

“I remember you saying that, so I thought you’d like to have it…”

Being told this once again, Natsuki let out a small gasp.

“But, Koyuki-kun, you’re a fan too, right? So you should be the one to keep it.”

It was bad if it seemed like she was reluctant about giving it back, so she held out the paper bag to him.

However, Koyuki-kun only shook his head, and refused to take it.

‘What should I do? It’s going to get wet from the rain at this rate…’

Since it couldn’t be helped, she took it back, but she still felt bad about receiving it for free.

As she stared intently at Koyuki, he soon broke eye contact and looked away.

“In return… Well, it might be selfish of me to say it like that, but….”

Speaking quietly and looking downwards, it was like he’d gone back to how he was before he’d cut his hair.

Since it seemed like he was having trouble saying it, she took a chance and urged him on in a lighthearted tone.

“Hmm? What is it? If it’s something that I can do, I don’t mind at all.”

Koyuki took a deep breath, and as if he’d made up his mind, raised his face again.

There wasn’t anything to hide his face anymore, like long bangs or glasses.

Underneath his passionate and serious gaze, Natsuki felt her heart beat loudly.

“During summer vacation, do you want to go out somewhere? W-With just the two of us, if possible….”

The moment he asked that, she felt her heartbeat quicken, and heat gather in her face.

‘C-Calm down, Natsuki! It’s just Koyuki-kun, right? It’ll be like hanging out as friends.’

Natsuki put a hand over her shirt to quiet her thumping heart, and gave a small nod.

“I-I’m looking forward to it….!”

Koyuki’s face lit up at Natsuki’s response.

“Well, alright then! I’ll text you about the details later.”

As if it was too early to discuss it right now, Koyuki quickly ran off.

Listening to his retreating footsteps against the rain-drenched concrete, Natsuki looked up at the roof of her umbrella in a daze.

‘What was that just now?’

“So, an invitation for a date, huh?”

As if in response to her thoughts, Miou mumbled this with perfect timing.

Natsuki let out a strange squeak of surprise, and started to feel even more self-conscious.

“I don’t think it’s really like a date or anything….”

When Natsuki muttered this in protest, Miou poked her cheek.

“Not very convincing when you’re blushing like that, you know?”

“Like I said, it’s not like that!”

“In that case, I’ll come along, too. That way, you won’t be nervous, right?”

As Akari innocently linked arms with hers, Miou let out a loud sigh.

“It’s true that Nacchan won’t be nervous, but wouldn’t that make you feel bad for Ayase-kun?”

“Huh? How come?”

Natsuki only paid half-attention to the conflicting conversation between the two, and started thinking deeply to herself.

Up until now, she and Koyuki had gotten along as two friends that shared the same interest in manga. She was sure that he felt the same way, and earlier, he hadn’t brought up the word “date” even once.

‘I’m just overthinking it….! Yeah, it’s fine to put it like that, right?’

But what if she was wrong?

That question lingered in the corner of Natsuki’s mind, but she tried her best to ignore it.

She couldn’t let a one-sided misunderstanding ruin their friendship.

‘It’s okay, it’s okay…’

Reassuring herself, she said cheerfully to the other two,

“Once it’s summer vacation, let’s hang out as the three of us! Promise?”

The last summer vacation of her high school life, was right around the corner.

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 4)

Here’s the fourth chapter of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks’ “**(Confession**

Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu“! Continuing from the previous chapter, things between Natsuki and Yuu start to become even more complicated as more misunderstandings come up!

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

←Chapter 3 | Chapter 5→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

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Hayasaka Akari Birthday: December 3
Horoscope Sign: Sagittarius
Blood Type: O
A close friend of Natsuki’s. In the Art Club. Has an easygoing personality, and her friendly smile has gained her many fans, but in reality, she’s actually pretty shy.

——

practice 4

The first weekend of summer vacation started off hectically.

Natsuki had been strangely too nervous to sleep the previous night, but by the time she’d finally fallen asleep, her alarm clock was ringing. She couldn’t remember what happened after that, and when she opened her eyes the second time, it was an hour before the meeting time.

“Shoot… I wanted to wake up early to spend time picking out what to wear, too…”

Natsuki tried on one outfit after another in front of her full-length mirror, but she just couldn’t decide on which combination to go with.

‘I’m going to meet Yoshida-sensei, so I can’t look too sloppy….!’

The text that she’d received from Koyuki after school that day had been an invitation to a signing event with the mangaka who Natsuki was a huge fan of.

It wasn't going to be at the amusement park, or the aquarium or anything, but naturally, a large bookstore in the city.

Since she'd be anticipating where they'd be going, at first she'd been a bit taken aback after reading the text, but truthfully, she was very excited to be meeting the mangaka who she admired so much.

Natsuki had hurried to book her own reservation for the signing event, and waited for this day to come.

"I'll just have to go with my best clothes….!"

From the mountain of clothes piled at her feet, Natsuki picked up a dress with cute lace down the chest area.

She'd fallen in love with it at first sight and bought it when she'd gone out with Miou and Akari.

"I've never really worn these kinds of clothes before, though… I wonder if it'll be okay."

Holding the dress up in front of her pajamas, she looked at her reflection in the mirror. She felt like it made her look much more clean and proper than usual.

"It's kinda like… a limited-time only thing, I guess?"

Smiling wryly at that simple way of putting it, Natsuki grabbed the bottom of her T-shirt.

"So, an invitation for a date, huh?"

She suddenly remembered Miou's words, and her hands froze.

'There's just no way….'

Koyuki had never said that it was a date, and anyway, they were going to a mangaka's signing event. Even if they did share the same interest in manga, he probably wouldn't choose something like that for a date.

In the first place, he'd never even confessed to her, so she was definitely just over-thinking it.

Beep beep! Beep beep!

As if to interrupt her thoughts, the cell phone that she'd left lying on her bed starting ringing.

"Oh, right, I set an alarm."

She hurriedly checked the time, and saw that there were only thirty minutes left.

There was no time to waste. Slapping both of her cheeks, Natsuki gracefully took off her T-shirt.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Heeey, Natsuki! I'm here to return your game!"

As soon she came out the front door, the person standing in front of the gate called out to her.

The moment they made eye contact, Yuu, who was holding a strategy guide and the game software, came running up.

"Sorry, I'm just about to go out. Could you leave them in the shoebox?"

"Going out with Aida and Hayasaka?"

'….H-Huh? But, doesn't it look like I'm dressed really nicely today?'

Feeling a bit uneasy under Yuu's gaze, Natsuki shook her head.

"No, I'm going out with Koyuki-kun today."

The moment she answered, it felt like the air around them had frozen.

A crease formed between Yuu's eyebrows, and he stared at Natsuki with a sharp gaze.

"Wh-What is it? What's wrong?"

"Is Haruki fine with that?"

Yuu's voice came out as a low growl, drowning out Natsuki had said.

She had no idea why, but it was clear that he was angry.

Angrier than she'd ever seen him before.

Resisting the urge to take a step back, Natsuki stared back at Yuu.

When she saw his slightly shaking hands, the way he bit down on his bottom lip, and how his eyes twitched as if fighting something back, Natsuki realized that she'd misinterpreted him.

'Yuu is… trying not to cry?'

He might not have been aware of it himself, but along with anger, there was another emotion lurking there.

When she realized that, she lost the will to give a strong reply.

"It's been decided that Akari's going to be the one drawing for the movie. So it's not like I have to meet up with Haruki now or anything. Anyway, Koyuki and I are just going to hang out. It'd be the same if I were to go with Mochita."

"You weren't chosen, so you're just giving up?"

When he immediately asked her that unexpected question, Natsuki held her breath.

It wasn't like she'd given up or anything. It was just that it'd already been decided that Akari would be the one drawing the pictures. She was sure that Yuu knew this, so why was he asking something like this now of all times?

"I don't… really get what you're trying to say…."

"You didn't answer my question. Even though you seemed so happy about Haruki praising you…

I've never even seen you look like that before."

Even when she'd honestly said she didn't understand, Yuu continued to press her for answers.

In all of her confusion, there was just one thing she was certain of.

'I have absolutely no idea what he's talking about!'

Had something happened that Natsuki wasn't aware of yet? No, there would have been a text about it, and she was sure that Yuu would also be explaining it to her right now, if that were the case.

'Then, what? What is it? What's going on here?!'

As Natsuki held her head in confusion, Yuu let out a sigh.

Wondering what he was going to say next, she lifted her head, and saw a large hand fill her vision.

She tensed up on instinct, but Yuu only patted her head with the palm of his hand.

“Eh? Yuu….?”

With her mouth hanging open, she looked up at her childhood friend’s face.

He was standing them, looking almost like an entirely different person with a mature smile on his face.

“Sorry, that wasn’t really my place to butt in, was it?”

See, this was exactly why I can never figure out what you’re angry about, or what’s bothering you.

Even though things would probably turn out fine as long as she replied with that, somehow, she couldn’t find the strength to.

Yuu patted Natsuki on the head again, like he’d do for his little sister, Hina.

“After all, I’m the one who said I’d cheer you on no matter who you like,”

The words that Yuu muttered so quietly, rang clearly in Natsuki’s ears.

However, she still couldn’t bring herself to say anything in response, and could only stand rooted to the spot like she was paralyzed.

“Shouldn’t you get going soon? You don’t wanna be late. Oh, right, this goes in the shoebox, right?”

Waving his hand, Yuu opened the front door of Natsuki’s house.

Even though it was something she was so used to seeing, for some reason, it made her chest hurt terribly.

‘Will Yuu and I always stay as just childhood friends…? Are we going to be like this forever?’

Ever since she’d started doing the confession rehearsals, Natsuki would tell him “I like you” at the end of every day, instead of the usual “See you tomorrow.”

And with each time she said it, she kept thinking about how she should just tell him for real already.

'What've I been doing all this time….'

All she was doing was running away from him. Using their relationship as "childhood friends," and the "confession rehearsals" as a safety net, and building up a wall so that she'd never have to get hurt.

Even though she'd tried to keep that up, in the end, tears of regret threatened to spill.

"I'm so useless…."

Natsuki's voice was drowned out by the cries of the cicadas, reaching no one's ears and left unheard.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Enomoto-san, are you alright?"

"….Huh?"

Her shoulders shook in a reserved fashion, and Natsuki looked up at the other with slow movements.

She blinked, and Koyuki, who was sitting there looking worried, came into focus.

A moment later, the surrounding sounds came back as well. She could hear the voices of other people talking from around them.

'Where is this….? The signing event…. Right, it already ended.'

The ice in the glass between her hands made a sound as it shifted, and she remembered that she'd ordered an iced cafe au lait. Since she'd left it alone for so long, a puddle of water had formed on the table underneath the glass.

"You don't seem like you have much of an appetite, huh. Is it because of the summer heat?"

"No, it's nothing like that! I think I'm just worn out from all the excitement of meeting Yoshida-sensei. Sorry for spacing out like that,"

Because the words just came out so naturally, even Natsuki was convinced

that was the reason why.

However, Koyuki still looked puzzled, and continued to look at her inquisitively.

“….Did something happen between you and Setoguchi-kun?”

That question instantly made her heart waver.

Like a ripple of water, the sensation spread throughout her whole body, and she nodded weakly.

“It’s not a big deal or anything, though… It’s just, I don’t really get what Yuu’s thinking lately.”

“Have you talked to him about it?”

“Of course not! There’s no way I could just bring that up.”

“But why? It’s bothering you, right?”

Natsuki was at a loss for words at Koyuki’s quick and sharp reply.

What he said made sense, but what bothered her was the fact that she didn’t know how to say it.

And what bothered her even more was that Koyuki had so easily figured out her situation.Of course, he was smart enough to score in the upper levels in the nationwide mock exams, so that thought process of his was to be expected.

Once he’d figured it out, he’d just gone ahead and said it outright…

‘Like aiming for the front first thing, instead of stalling around, huh.’

“Koyuki-kun… You’ve really changed a lot. Not just with the way you look, but you’ve gotten more aggressive, like with the way you talk.”

“Do you… think so? If I have, then it’s because you gave me that push from behind,”

As if he was telling her a secret, Koyuki lowered his voice.

“Huh? Wait, huuuh?! Me? But I haven’t done anything!”

“Ahaha! I thought you might say that,”

Koyuki seemed to find something hilarious, and bent over the table in a burst of laughter.

When he lifted his face again, he wiped the tears that had gathered in the corners of his eyes, leaving Natsuki bewildered.

“Did I really say something so funny….?”

“No, I was just thinking about how completely opposite it is.”

After taking a drink from his iced tea, Koyuki continued talking calmly, like he was giving the solution for a mathematical formula.

“The reason I changed was because of you, Enomoto-san. But to you, the specific reason that caused me to change was something so ‘natural’ that you didn’t pay any particular attention to it. So that’s why you don’t remember.”

“Is that… really how it is?”

Unable to follow his explanation, Natsuki couldn’t honestly say that she understood.

However, Koyuki quickly clarified.

“That’s how I think it is. Applying it to your situation with Setoguchi-kun, since the two of you are childhood friends, it was ‘natural’ for you to understand what the other is thinking. On the other hand, that might’ve caused you two to lose the chance to talk to each other about your feelings.”

Talk to each other about our feelings…

As Natsuki repeated the phrase to herself, she felt the fog that been obstructing her vision begin to clear.

‘….I see. So I got too used to what was “natural.”’

She felt like she didn’t understand the conversation, but she’d hesitated in taking another step forward.

Up until now, she’d never felt the need to talk about her feelings, so she had always interpreted things in a way that made it convenient for herself, and become afraid to face the truth again.

‘All this time, we’ve put off confirming each other’s feelings.’

As Natsuki sat there in silence, Koyuki responded by lowering his head.

"I'm sorry. As an outsider, I shouldn't just be assuming things…."

"Ah, you don't need to apologize! Honestly, I think that's how it probably is, too."

Waving both of her hands frantically, Natsuki suggesting they continue with their lunch.

"More importantly, let's eat the pasta while it's still fresh!"

Koyuki looked back up, and seemed like he still had something to say, but when Natsuki looked at him questionably, he only shook his head. The expression on his face looked just a little sad.

'Did Koyuki-kun get tired of me….?'

After all, the reason they'd just had that conversation earlier was because she'd been spacing out.

To top it off, she felt like Koyuki-kun had helped solve the problem that had been bothering her, but since it was such a personal matter, she couldn't really tell him the details about it.

'Once I tell Yuu how I really feel, that's when I'll thank Koyuki-kun properly, too.'

If it was Natsuki that had given Koyuki a push from behind, then this time, it was Koyuki who had given her that push she needed.

When she thanked him, she'd let him know just how grateful she was for that.

At that time, she believed that it wouldn't be too long before that day would come.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

'What do I do, we're already at the park….'

Natsuki let out a quiet sigh next to Koyuki, whose eyes were shining unusually bright.

She was happy when he'd said he would see her off, but she didn't think he

meant all the way to her doorstep.

She'd been surprised enough that he'd accompanied her to the nearest train stop, but when Koyuki started to walk ahead, casually saying, "Come on, let's go," Natsuki had been too stunned to do anything but follow after him.

'Even when I said I'd be fine since it's still light out, he didn't listen to me at all.'

Koyuki had been surprisingly stubborn.

After worrying over it long enough, Natsuki boldly stopped in her tracks.

"Koyuki-kun, really, you don't have to walk me all the way…. You won't remember the way back to the station, right?"

"….Alright. I don't want to be a bother to you, after all."

Natsuki smiled wryly at the honesty of Koyuki's words.

'He's been like this the entire day….'

Koyuki had always been polite when speaking, but today, he'd acted just like a butler or a knight would. He'd treated Natsuki just like how a upper-class lady or a princess might be treated, so she couldn't help but feel shy about it.

'I mean, Koyuki-kun really took care of everything.'

As if it were only natural, he'd held open every single door for her, along with pulling out her chair, and even walked on the side of sidewalk facing the cars.

'I felt bad when he said he'd pay for lunch, since he was the one who had invited me out today, though.'

Koyuki really was a nice person.

Even if she tried to return the favor in some tangible form, he probably wouldn't accept it.

That was why, for now, Natsuki simply faced him with a smile showing all of her gratitude.

"Thank you for today! I had a lot of fun."

“No, thank you. It was… like a dream.”

“Ehh? Quit exaggerating, Koyuki-kun.”

Giving an embrarassed laugh, Natsuki playfully hit Koyuki’s upper arm, just like she’d do to Yuu or Haruki.

Although his arms looked thin and soft, she felt muscle there when she hit him.

‘Well, duh, Koyuki-kun’s a guy too, after all….’

“Enomoto-san!”

Koyuki suddenly called her name, and took hold of her wrist.

Seeing the serious expression on his face, Natsuki held her breath.

‘Is he the type that doesn’t like being touched?’

She was used to more rough skinship with Yuu and the others, so it’d slipped her mind. It was possible that Koyuki wasn’t very comfortable with physical contact.

Just as she was about to apologize, she heard the sound of a bicycle going by right behind her.

She flinched on instinct, and Koyuki immediately let go out her hand.

“S-Sorry! Did I hurt you?”

“No, I’m okay. Actually, I’m sorry for hitting you.”

As she apologized to Koyuki, Natsuki watched the bicycle from the corner of her eye.

It was a perfectly ordinary ladies’ bicycle, with supermarket bags in the basket in the front. The person riding one was a woman, too, and not who she’d thought it was.

“Enomoto-san? What’s the matter?”

“Ah, I was just remembering how this is his usual route….”

She seemed to have caught Yuu’s habit of leaving out words, and saying things without context.

But for some reason, Koyuki understood exactly what she meant, and replied by saying, “Oh, you mean Setoguchi-kun’s.”

How did he know that?

Before she could ask, Koyuki grabbed her wrist again.

He pulled her towards him, and her head smacked right into his collarbone.

‘Ouch, that must have hurt….!’

Those were her first thoughts, but Koyuki seemed unfazed. Instead, he wrapped his other arm around her back, holding her against his chest.

“Do you know what kind of face you made just now?”

She heard his voice at her ear, and tried to shift her body around to look up at him.

However, Koyuki’s arms were stronger than she thought, and the most she could do was turn her neck.

‘Koyuki-kun, what’s gotten into you….?’

Between her confusion and uneasiness, Natsuki couldn’t register what he meant by that question.

As if impatient with her silence, Koyuki continued.

“If it were me, I would never give you reason to make such a sad face. I would try hard for you, with only the best of intentions.”

The pounding of Koyuki’s heartbeat rang clearly in her ears.

Natsuki’s own heartbeat sped up as well, restless like she’d just done a sprint.

So much that it hurt.

“So, instead of Setoguchi-kun–”

“Instead of me, what?”

She heard a voice from behind her, cutting off Koyuki’s speech.

There was no mistaking that voice she was so used to hearing.

“…Yuu….”

Pulling away from Koyuki, who had loosened his grip, she turned around with slow steps.

With the sunset directly behind him, Yuu’s face was cast in shadow and hard to make out.

But strangely, it was obvious that he was angry. The atmosphere was strained, so much that it was painful to be standing there.

“Say, Ayase,”

Yuu acted like Natsuki wasn’t there, and glared only at Koyuki.

Koyuki didn’t even falter, and simply nodded with a smile on his face.

Feeling the tension inevitably rise, Natsuki clenched the hem of her dress nervously.

“Have you ever heard of the term, ‘TPO’? It means being mindful of how to act when it comes to certain times, places, and occasions. This is a public place, where neighborhood residents like myself could just come walking by. If you’re so casual about things like that in public, you’ll cause trouble for Natsuki.”

“‘Things like that’?”

Whether he really didn’t understand, or if he was just testing him, Koyuki immediately asked Yuu what he was referring to.

Yuu clicked his tongue, something he rarely did, and stepped closer to Koyuki.

“I *mean*

, if you have the time to be acting like her boyfriend, then at least think about her feelings more.”

“….Shouldn’t you be following your own advice first?”

“No need to.”

When Yuu gave a quick reply, the smile disappeared from Koyuki’s face.

His eyes widened as if surprised, and then narrowed into a glare.

Unable to keep up with the two, Natsuki could only watch them in silence.

“May I ask why that is?”

“It’s because Natsuki and I are childhood friends… Even the neighbors can confirm that.”

“Ahh, childhood friends. I see.”

Koyuki seemed to scoff, and Yuu became even more visibly annoyed.

Even to Natsuki, it looked like Koyuki was trying to provoke Yuu.

‘Why is he acting like this? Is this… really Koyuki-kun….?’

She knew that she had to get between the two of them, but her legs wouldn’t move.

Even when she tried to yell, which was the least she could do, her voice wouldn’t come out.

The more impatient she got to do something, the more she felt her throat tightening.

‘Please, don’t fight….’

She stared at them, hoping to convey that message. Yuu was the first to notice. When their eyes met, he looked startled, and gradually, the wrinkles between his eyebrows increased.

‘B-But why? Did it backfire?’

Could it be that he thought she was trying to stand up for Koyuki?

Despite the panic that Natsuki was currently in, Yuu took another step in front of her.

“In any case, I won’t forgive anyone who makes Natsuki cry.”

It was clear by Yuu’s indifferent voice that he hadn’t given into Koyuki’s taunt.

Letting out the breath she was holding, Natsuki felt something cold and wet drip down around her collarbone.

‘What was that….? Rain?’

She looked up at the sky, but before she could find any clouds, her vision blurred over.

As she weakly lifted her hand to rub at her eyes, she felt a dampness at her fingertips.

“….H-Huh?”

“That’s how it is, so let’s go.”

Without waiting for a reply or even bothering to ask her opinion, Yuu wrapped his arm around her shoulders and started walking.

She tried to tell him to wait, but all she could do was sniff.

‘Stupid, this isn’t the time to be crying….’

I have to apologize to Koyuki-kun.

I have to clear up Yuu’s misunderstanding.

Despite these thoughts, the tears just kept falling, preventing her from speaking.

“

It isn’t fair of you to do this if you aren’t going to compete!

”

She heard Koyuki yell after them, but it wasn’t for them to stop.

To top it off, she wasn’t sure who his words were directed at.

When she looked up at her childhood friend walking beside her, he had a dissatisfied look on his face.

‘Then… that was meant for Yuu?’

However, he gave no reaction whatsoever, and his mouth remained glued shut.

After that, Koyuki didn’t say anything else, and she heard the distant sound of his footsteps as he ran off.

‘Why….? Why did things end up like this?’

Holding back her sobs, Natsuki repeated this answerless question in her head.

The sunset that day was a terrible strain on her eyes.

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 5)

Here’s the fifth chapter of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks’ “**(Confession**

Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu”! This chapter focuses on Yuu’s point of view, and how things develop after confronting Koyuki at the park that day.

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

←Chapter 4 | Chapter 6→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

——

Mochizuki Souta Birthday: September 3
Horoscope Sign: Virgo
Blood Type: B

Natsuki’s childhood friend. In the Film Club. Can be honest to a fault, and is often teased by his friends.
——

practice 5 His school uniform still felt stiff on his body.

Even after a week had passed since the end of summer vacation, Yuu still wasn’t used to wearing his uniform again.

‘Come to think of it, I was absent for the first day back this year, too…’

Although it was because the first day back at school had overlapped with cram school boot camp, Yuu was glad that he’d had a legitimate excuse to not have to see Koyuki.

Ever since he’d caught him on that “date” with Natsuki, things between them had been like a cold war.

‘….Somehow, this summer vacation felt really short.’

As he headed for short homeroom, the heat got the better of him, and he unbuttoned his collar.

Although summer vacation itself had ended in a flash, the heat of summer still lingered. It was so hot, he felt like he might melt.

‘Ugh, speak of the devil…’

Looking out the window, he saw Koyuki crouched down in front of a flowerbed. Back when he’d met him at the park, his skin had been even paler than Natsuki’s, but after tending to the flowerbeds outside as part of his club activities, it seemed like he’d gotten a bit tanned.

Yuu stopped walking, and watched his head of soft hair move restlessly.

‘I guess he really does have a crush on Natsuki, huh…’

He’d suspected as such a while back, due to the fact that Koyuki looked at Natsuki in a way that made it seem like he thought of her as more than just a classmate or a friend that shared the same interests.

What confirmed his doubts were the words that Koyuki had said to him at the park.

“It isn’t fair of you to do this if you aren’t going to compete!”

He must have meant competing to be Natsuki’s boyfriend.

‘Still, it’s not like Ayase’s confessed yet, either.’

If he had, Natsuki would have shown some kind of reaction.

He’d tried asking her about it offhandedly, but it didn’t seem like he had, after all.

“Like I’m saying, you’re just misunderstanding.”

The day after he’d walked her home from the park, that was the first thing Natsuki had said to him when she’d stormed up to his room.

She told him that she’d started crying because she’d been started by Yuu’s sudden aggressiveness.

Although it sounded like a bad excuse, he decided not to push it anymore, since there was something else that bothered him even more.

“Then what about Ayase hugging you? What was that all about?”

Natsuki had widened her eyes, and then nervously averted her gaze.

Yuu stared at her, waiting patiently for an answer as to not jump to baseless

conclusions again.

Before long, Natsuki crossed her arms in front of her chest, and said while tilting her head,

"Why *was* he hugging me?"

That's what I wanna know!

Holding back the urge to scream, he tried to get an answer out of her by asking more questions.

But since she only laughed and promptly replied with, "I don't really remember!" he had no choice but to give up.

Moreover, after getting annoyed over how clueless Natsuki was, they'd ended up getting into an argument and splitting up for the day.

'Although, thanks to Hina butting in, we started talking like usual again by the next day…'

Natsuki must have also felt something like an invisible wall had been wedged between them.

They'd stopped doing confession rehearsals lately, and even when they tried chatting, it felt strangely awkward.

"…Wish everything would just work themselves out…"

As if he'd heard him mutter this to himself, Koyuki turned to face in his direction.

Feeling their eyes meet, Yuu quickly moved away from the window.

'Wait, what am I running away for?'

He thought, and looked out the window again, but Koyuki was already nowhere to be seen.

"….Guess I'll head over for my club activities too."

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Face-to-face with Haruki and Souta in the club room, Yuu flipped through the pages of the script , covered in sticky notes.

He snuck a glance at the other two, and noticed they were acting a bit strangely. They kept suddenly going back a page, or turning several pages at once at weird timings.

'Well, with how dark those circles under their eyes are, I guess it's a given they're kinda out of it.'

A movie isn't completed as soon as the filming is done; there's a lot of editing that has to be done before the final product.

Counting backwards from the deadline date, they didn't have much time to finish filming the scenes.

'They've been working hard with filming even when I have cram school, huh…'

Now, it was Yuu's turn to take the baton.

He tightened his grip on the script in his hand, and spoke up in a firm voice.

"So basically, we've filmed all the scenes that we're able to at the moment. I'll help check them over for now."

"…Yeah, thanks,"

Haruki answered in a slightly hoarse voice, and beside him, Souta nodded limply.

He felt bad for pressing them about it so suddenly, but without understanding how far everyone was, it would be hard to manage the schedule. While still feeling apologetic, Yuu opened his memo for taking notes and continued.

"Mochita, how are Hayasaka's drawings coming along?"

"….Um, well, about that…."

As Souta struggled to answer, Yuu glanced over at Haruki.

However, Haruki only shook his head loosely and gestured at Souta with his chin.

'Guess that he means that Mochita's in charge of this.'

At first, Haruki had also helped in contacting Akari, but in the end, that task

had been left solely to Souta. They'd been contacting each other through text messages, but since Souta still seemed pretty nervous about it despite that, Yuu had been a bit worried….

"Don't tell me you've lost contact with her?"

"Have you even been texting her like you're supposed to?"

"What?! Come on, of course I have!"

As Souta furrowed his brows in annoyance, Yuu and Haruki cracked jokes at him one after another.

"Even so, weren't you about to pass out the last time you guys met in person?"

"If I hadn't acted quickly enough and taken over when I did, he would've fainted right then and there."

"Th-Thanks a lot for saving me that time…! But really, I've been doing fine on my own now. I even go to see see how much she's done once a week."

Souta pounded his chest in triumph, but in contrast to that, his expression darkened a bit.

"If it's going so well, what are you making that face for?"

"That's because, um, well…."

As soon as Yuu called him out, Souta got flustered again.

Just as Yuu was about to give him that last push for an answer, Haruki snapped his fingers.

"I know. It's because Hayasaka's the problem, right?"

'Oh, I get it now. He doesn't want to say it because he doesn't want to put the blame on her.'

It turned out that Haruki had guessed correctly.

Souta turned pale, and then nodded reluctantly.

"She finished the sketch, and has already started coloring it, but… She said that there was still 'something' missing, and hasn't made any progress since

then to finish it."

Haruki nodded frequently, as if this was all very familiar to him, while Yuu held his head.

"That always seems to happen when you're making something, huh."

"And what're more, suggestions from other people don't help at all. It's something you just have to figure out for yourself…."

Yuu stated, speaking from experience. Souta smiling bitterly, and then continued.

"I tried asking her what she was stuck on, but even she didn't seem to know how to respond. She started getting all philosophically, and saying things like, 'What is love, anyway?'"

"Ughhh, this seriously isn't good…"

As Yuu scratched the back of his head, Haruki immediately asked, "Why's that?"

Souta seemed surprised by Haruki's words, and turned to stare at him.

Even with two people staring him down, Haruki didn't seem particularly fazed, and spoke absently,

"Look, it's not like Hayasaka was saying 'What is love?' in a really philosophical way, like 'What is the meaning of life?' or anything. She just doesn't really get it, that's all."

"….I-I still don't understand. Can you say that one more time?"

"Mochita, you're just thinking too hard. Listen, it basically means that Hayasaka's never had any experience with dating anyone. That's it."

After he'd said that, it was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop.

Putting it in Haruki's words, that meant that Akari hadn't had her first love yet, even since entering high school.

'Well, it's not like she's completely oblivious. Everyone has at least some experience with love.'

While Yuu thought to himself quietly, Souta slowly spoke up.

“Come to think of it, Akarin was my first love….”

“Mochita, quit blushing when you’re the one saying that…. You’ll make me feel embarrassed too.”

“Like you’re one to talk when you can’t even face your first love,”

Haruki snickered at Yuu, making him grimace.

‘You’re the last person I want to hear that from,’

Yuu wanted to snap back, but since it’d just sound like he was picking a fight, he kept those words to himself.

Instead, he asked teasingly,

“Speaking of which… Haruki, how are things between you and Aida?”

“Same as usual? Or, well actually, she said she can’t walk home with me for a while.”

Due to how casually he’d said it, their initial reactions were delayed.

After lowly processing those words, brains sluggish from the heat, it finally clicked.

“….What? Wait, hold on a minute, doesn’t that mean she’s trying to distance herself from you?”

“Yeah, something’s definitely wrong here!”

Souta jumped up from his seat as well, and pointed at Haruki fervently.

However, Haruki only leaned forward on the desk, propping up his chin with the palm of his hand, and stared as if he was watching a variety TV show in his living room.

“Wow, you guys sure have some fiery reactions!”

“You’re the one that’s too cold, Haruki! Are you really fine with that? Did you ask her why?”

Haruki looked up at the ceiling before replying, as if it was too hard to look at Souta acting so worried like this was his problem.

“Hm? Well… She said something about being busy with the art contest.”

“So it’s not because of you or anything, then. That’s good.”

“Geez, don’t worry us like that….”

Yuu also breathed a sigh of relief, but he came to realize that Haruki hadn’t answered the original question.

When he’d asked him earlier about how things were going between him and Miou, Haruki had dodged the question. Even though Yuu had intentionally avoided phrasing it more like, “Did anything happen with you and Aida yet?” Haruki hadn’t even flinched.

“Actually, Haruki and Aida aren’t even going out with each other, right?”

“Ah, I wanted to ask about that, too.”

As Souta took the opportunity to bring up this fact, it was turning into their usual two-on-one scheme.

However, Haruki showed no sign of giving in, and merely let out a long sigh.

He ignored Souta, who was leaning forward in anticipation, and threw a sharp look over at Yuu.

“And what would be the point in asking? If I told you that I was going out with Aida…. No, that’s not right. If I said that I liked anyone other than Natsuki, would you feel relieved? And then what?”

He felt like he’d just been punched right in the face.

Yuu was as a loss for words, and could only stare blankly back at Haruki.

‘He’s right. I wanted the reassurance.’

The numbness of his mind faded, and slowly started working again.

And then, the first thing that came to mind was the reality that he’d been desperately avoiding.

Even if Natsuki really did like Haruki, if Haruki liked someone else, then the worst-case scenario would be avoided.

Ever since she’d chosen him as her confession rehearsal partner, Yuu had always hoped for those terrible circumstances.

Moreover, he hadn't even acknowledged those guilty feelings, instead choosing to keep them under lock and key, and all the while, acting like he was still on Natsuki's side. It was completely pathetic.

'In the end, it was probably just because I was jealous of Ayase and Haruki….'

"Hey, Yuu."

He wasn't sure how long he sat spacing out, but Souta's voice pulled him back to reality.

Their eyes met, and Souta looked back at him with an expression of worry, but also a bit of relief.

"I don't really get what's going on, but aren't you hungry?"

"Huh….?"

Haruki didn't say anything at first, and nodded as he started gathering his things to leave.

"It feels like a hole could open up in my stomach from how empty it is. I haven't eaten anything since last night."

"Yeah, and you slept through the entire lunch break, too…."

As Souta laughed dryly, Haruki looked over at Yuu again.

His gaze wasn't sharp at all, like it was before. Instead, the corner of his lips lifted up in a grin.

"Let's go get ramen!"

"….Let's go to that newly-opened place. It's behind the supermarket."

Yuu rose from his seat as well, sharing info on his new favorite place.

"Huh? You already found a new one? You sure do love ramen a lot, Yuu."

After that, things went back to how they usually were.

As the three of them laughed over stupid things, they left the classroom.

'….No, we can't just go pretend like nothing happened.'

"And what would be the point in asking? If I told you that I was going out with Aida…. No, that's not right. If I said that I liked anyone other than

Natsuki, you'll feel relieved, right? And then what?"

While he didn't know Haruki's true intentions, for Yuu, those questions had meaning.

As soon he figured out what the problem was exactly, he'd be able to find his answer, as well.

When they passed through the school gates, Yuu whispered just loud enough for Haruki to hear,

"You helped me realize something. Thanks."

Haruki looked like he was caught off guard for a moment before he grinned and wrapped an arm around Yuu's shoulders.

"If you get dumped, let's go out for ramen again."

"H-Hey, don't jinx it!"

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

As Yuu looked around at the roster surrounding the brand-new table, his expression turned bitter.

Sitting to his right was Souta with his wonton ramen; Haruki sat directly in front of him with shio and green onions; and right next to him was Koyuki with a chashu ramen. Everyone gave their compliments to the chef, and showed off their hearty eating in spite of the summer heat.

'That's right, the ramen's great. It's the best.'

Even Yuu's shouyu ramen was so good that he already wanted seconds.

This place was a hit, no doubt about it.

'But why is he here?'

He traced his memory back to about thirty minutes ago.

It had all started when Souta had recognized Koyuki from afar in front of the train station and run up to him. Waving excitedly as he ran up to his classmate, he was just like a puppy.

"Yukki! Wait no, I mean, Ayase-kun! Are you free right now? Wanna come

eat ramen with us?”

“Ahaha, you can call me Yukki if you’d like. Ramen? Sure, I’d love to.”

Souta had never called Koyuki by nickname before.

But in spite of that, he spoke familiarly to him, and Koyuki also responded in kind.

‘Wh-What just happened….?’

As Yuu stood there dumbfounded, Haruki had patted him smartly on the back and said to him,

“Well isn’t this a great opportunity? To have a nice man-to-man talk, that is.”

Just how much did he even know?

Yuu was starting to feel scared that Haruki knew everything that went on with him.

Although he was just about to ask about it, it would be a pain if the tables turned against him, so he decided to stay quiet. They took his silence as him having no objections, and in the end, Koyuki wound up joining them for ramen.

‘….Mochita really gets along well with Ayase, huh.’

After he’d finished eating his noodles, Souta started bombarding Koyuki with questions, as if he’d been waiting for this chance to interrogate him.

The main topic of discussion was Koyuki’s recent transformation.

“Wow! So you got your hair done at a salon in Aoyama that you read about in a magazine?”

“I thought I’d start changing how I looked, first.”

“That’s true. It really depends on which hairdresser you go to. You look really good with that style.”

Koyuki seemed embarrassed about being complimented in person, and shrunk back, casting his gaze downwards.

“I’m still the same on the inside, though, so change can only go so far….”

As Koyuki laughed weakly, Souta tried to encourage him.

"Yukki, you should have more self-confidence. It's amazing that you can just transform yourself like this, you know!"

Koyuki seemed surprised at first, but he smiled back shyly when he seemed to realize Souta was only telling him this out of good intentions.

'Hearing him talk about it like this, it doesn't seem like he changed himself just to show off….'

It was true that while his appearance was different now, Yuu couldn't sense any of that brazen air that Koyuki had shown with his provocative behavior back at the park that day.

'….Well, it seems like he can look people in the eye when he talks now.'

Before, he would always hide his eyes behind his long bangs, and had a habit of looking down a lot. The only time he used to look people in the eye was when he was talking about manga.

"Whatever the reason is, it's amazing he could completely transform himself like that,"

Right before summer vacation, Souta had said this while looking out at the window at Koyuki, squinting his eyes against the bright sunlight.

Yuu had told his childhood friend, "I personally think that you're fine the way you are, Mochita," but he knew that unless he acknowledged those words himself, they had no meaning.

'Want to change, huh….'

Before he knew it, there was a deafening silence.

Just as he was starting to feel suspicious, he noticed that all three of them were staring at him.

"….Wh-What is it? What's wrong?"

"Well, I mean, you just said, 'I want to change,' didn't you?"

Souta said this with a puzzled look, frozen in place.

He glanced over at Haruki, and he also nodded.

“Yeah, you did.”

‘Oh, crap….!’

He’d meant to say that in his head, but he’d accidentally said it out loud.

Unable to think of a good way to play it off as a joke, Yuu awkwardly averted his gaze.

“So even you can feel that way, Setoguchi-kun?”

The one who broke the silence was neither Souta nor Haruki, but Koyuki.

He sounded surprised, like what Yuu had said was something unusual.

“….Is there a problem with that?”

“Ah, I didn’t mean it in a bad way…. From how I see it, you’re very lucky to have what you do now.”

His unique way of wording reminded him of Haruki.

However, unlike with Haruki, Yuu felt some hostility from Koyuki’s statement.

‘He does seem like a self-conscious person, after all….’

It would prove that what had happened at the park hadn’t entirely been caused by Yuu’s misunderstanding.

Would he ignore this? Or accept the challenge?

Hesitating only for a moment, Yuu took some chashu from his own bowl and put it in Koyuki’s.

“Thanks. I’ll share some chashu with you for that.”

“Ah, no fair! I want some too!”

As Souta cried out, Haruki played along, as well.

“Don’t worry, it’s not hard to win Yuu over with flattery.”

As the other two starting stirring up a commotion, Koyuki blinked, and then let out a breathy laugh.

“You really are lucky to have them, Setoguchi-kun.”

His wording was still vague, but judging by his lonely expression, Yuu could guess what he meant.

Yuu wasn't sure how to respond to this topic, but he decided to just say what he thought.

"Most of the time, they're just really annoying."

"….Even so, I envy you."

Koyuki's reply made Yuu's impression of him change slightly.

'Does he really mean that….?'

He still saw him as his love rival, but there seemed to be more to him than just that. However, considering his provoking demeanor and sarcasm from before, it was possible that he was only saying what came to mind.

Of course, he could also be trying to start something again, like with what he'd said before.

Although Koyuki had used the word "compete" then, he might've also been trying to make Yuu realize what position he was in. That was, assuming he thought of Natsuki as more than a childhood friend.

It was then that it came to him.

'But why would Ayase go out of his way to make sure I knew my position?'

It would obviously be more advantageous to be up against fewer opponents.

While the competition was still watching passively, he could've just approached Natsuki himself, increasing his chances of going out with her.

'It's almost as if Ayase was purposely…'

"Here's my chance!"

Too busy with his thoughts, Yuu didn't notice someone sneaking up beside him until the last moment.

In a cheerful voice, Souta announced his assault and snatched a thick piece of chashu from Yuu's bowl.

"I'll be taking this, thanks!"

“Mochita… don’t make so much noise when we’re eating!”

“You’re plenty noisy yourself, Yuu.”

Oddly enough, their lines flowed perfectly together, as if this was a skit they’d rehearsed beforehand.

Even Koyuki commented, “You’re all in perfect sync,” and burst out laughing.

‘Things are never serious when I’m with these guys….’

Yuu let out a loud sigh, and faced his bowl to begin eating the rest of the noodles. If he didn’t, he’d probably get taken advantage of again for letting his guard down.

Just as Koyuki said, Yuu was “lucky” to have such good friends.

That was why, for now, Yuu decided to gulp down his doubts about Koyuki together with the thick, flavorful soup.

He wanted to enjoy this noisy, but friendly atmosphere while it lasted.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

However, it didn’t last long.

As soon as they’d finished eating and walked outside the ramen shop, Koyuki called out to him in a serious tone.

“Setoguchi-kun, could I have a bit more of your time?”

Yuu was surprised at being suddenly nominated, and as expected, Souta shot his hand in the air, shouting, “Count me in, too!”

But Koyuki could only knit his brows apologetically.

“I’m sorry, I’d like it to be just the two of us, if possible…”

‘Don’t say it in such a misleading way!’

As if he’d heard Yuu’s thoughts, Haruki gave a toothy grin.

“Well if you put it like that, there’s no way he could turn you down.”

Any opinion that Yuu had on the matter was promptly ignored. Haruki already had Souta, who seemed like he still wanted to talk to Koyuki, caught by the nape of his neck, and he left while waving with his free hand.

Being the only only left behind, Yuu looked up at the sky with a feeling of incredible fatigue.

The sun had already set a while ago, and the moon gave off a soft light.

'At this point, I can't help but feel like I have some kind of obligation to fulfill….'

Maybe it was like a game where he had to clear this event to reach the ending.

As he thought of these things that were somewhere between being serious and joking around, Yuu nodded reluctantly.

Koyuki let out a soft sigh.

"Do you mind if we go somewhere else?"

He said, and started walking off.

Just as he was about to ask how far they were going, Koyuki stopped in the middle of a nearby parking lot.

'I guess he wants to talk about something that he doesn't want other people overhearing.'

The back side of the station was currently under construction, with only a supermarket nearby.

The warm wind carried the sounds of the lively voices advertising the limited time sale.

"So what did you want to talk about?"

"Do you feel like competing now?"

They asked each other at almost the exact same time.

Having been suddenly cut off by Koyuki's question, he felt pretty annoyed.

"Uh, what?"

Although Yuu sounded confused, Koyuki continued without flinching.

"I'm prepared even if it ends up being drawn-out for a long time."

"Wait, just hold on a minute…."

Knowing that it would be pointless to ask what he was talking about, Yuu closed his mouth.

It wasn't that he didn't understand what was going on, just that everything was coming so fast.

Although he knew it'd make him seem embarrassed, Yuu let out a deep sigh. He knew that he'd been purposely avoiding Koyuki until now, so he couldn't exactly blame him for this confrontation.

'Since it's come to this, I guess I've got no choice but to step into the ring he's set up.'

"….You mentioned 'competing' the other day too, but it's not like you've confessed, right?"

"I haven't."

Koyuki didn't seem fazed that Yuu had guessed correctly, and simply smiled.

On the other hand, Yuu was surprised at how cheerful he was being.

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Yes."

He answered, his reply just as blunt as before.

Maybe this was another way of challenging him.

He imagined that if he didn't go along with it right now, he would only be called out like this again another day.

'This is so annoying!'

Although he complained about it in his head, Yuu still decided to boldly accept his challenge.

"….Alright, assuming for a moment that I do have romantic feelings for Natsuki, let me ask you something. Back when we met at the park during summer vacation, if I had confessed to Natsuki then, what would you have done?"

Koyuki's smile faded upon hearing Yuu's question.

However, his smile soon returned, widening more as he spoke.

"I would have challenged to you to a contest, fair and square."

Hearing Koyuki's answer, Yuu frowned, thinking, "I knew he'd say that."

Koyuki had purposely challenged Yuu in front of Natsuki so that his feelings would be dragged out in the open.

He'd expected as much, but his reasons for doing so were still unclear.

"….What are you up to? Increasing your number of rivals, and lowering your chances of success, just what are you planning?"

"I already told you. I just want to have a fair contest."

This time, Koyuki's smile vanished for good.

Yuu could feel a challenging spirit emitting not just his words, but his entire body.

As Yuu hesitated with how he should react, Koyuki continued.

"That was my way of declaring war, you could say. Just like how I'm standing before you now."

"….Why does it have to be me…."

Had Koyuki been able to hear his hoarse voice?

He'd said it mostly to himself, barely above a whisper.

'I'm not the one who Natsuki likes…'

If he told the truth, he probably wouldn't be forced to stand in the ring anymore.

With that in mind, the words lingered on his lips, ready to be said aloud.

While part of him wanted to be free of this, betraying Natsuki's feelings like that was an entirely different story. In the first place, no matter who Natsuki liked, it was likely that Koyuki's attitude wouldn't change.

As if to shake off those thoughts, Yuu pushed his bangs aside.

With his vision now slightly clearer, he looked straight at Koyuki.

“Tell me, do you honestly like Natsuki?”

“….Setoguchi-kun, do you know what my first name is?”

“What?”

Yuu blinked in surprise, both at his question being answered with a question, and at the sudden change of topic.

However, Koyuki simply continued on with a serious expression on his face.

“It’s written with the kanji for love and snow, Koyuki. It sounds like a girl’s name, right? And since I looked like one, too, everyone would always jokingly call me ‘Yuki-chan’….”

“But Natsuki would call you ‘Koyuki-kun,’ right?”

Yuu added without thinking, and as if holding back his happiness, Koyuki nodded “yes” in response.

‘So that’s how it is….’

To Koyuki, Natsuki was the person who had given him a reason to change.

It wasn’t just that she had given him the courage to change, but also the fact that he wanted to change for her sake especially.

‘In that case, what’s the point in provoking me like this?’

As his doubts increased, Yuu looked over at Koyuki again.

“You know, you seem really eager to make this into a contest, but how’re you going to do that, huh? Whoever she says yes to wins? Hah, how stupid is that?”

Getting more and more heated up by the second, Yuu exploded right then and there.

“What’s the point in just going up and confessing? Natsuki can only choose one of us, and there’s a chance she won’t even choose either of us. What then? Comfort each other after being rejected?”

He’d gotten more worked up than expected, and by the time he finished talking, his breath was ragged.

Koyuki remained silent, and stared intently back at him.

Unable to read the emotions in his eyes, Yuu could only continue this one-sided rant.

“Put yourself in Natsuki’s shoes for a minute, would you? If both her friend and her childhood friend confess at the same time, don’t you think she’ll feel too pressured to turn down either of them?”

“Setoguchi-kun, you’re assuming that you’ll be rejected, then.”

When Koyuki finally spoke, a wry smile emerged on his face.

‘I’m the one who wants to laugh here.’

With the way he’d worded it, it was like Koyuki claimed he would bring different results. Whether it was because he was truly confident in succeeding, or was just trying to provoke him, either way, it was meaningless.

‘In the end, you don’t get what’s really important.’

While feeling a strange urge to cry, Yuu laughed cynically.

“I’d prefer that over causing a misunderstanding. You just want to force your feelings onto Natsuki, don’t you? No matter how much you like someone, there’s something wrong with forcing them to accept your feelings.”

“….I simply like Enomoto-san as she is, that’s all. Even if she doesn’t return my feelings, I would still continue to like her.”

He couldn’t understand at all.

Truthfully, Yuu wanted to ask, “What the hell is that supposed to mean?” but Koyuki still smiled quietly.

He kept waiting for several more seconds, but Koyuki didn’t elaborate on his answer any further.

‘Was I supposed to say my last words and then leave…?’

Having lost the timing to end the conversation, he heard his smartphone vibrate from inside his bag.

With it being this late, it was probably Hina. She was probably texting him about what to do for dinner.

‘She gets annoying if I answer her texts too late…. Worst case scenario, she’ll start calling me, too.’

It was the perfect opportunity to get him out of this situation.

Koyuki seemed to sense Yuu’s intentions, and looked at him like he wanted to say something.

“Oh, come on! Just say it already!”

Losing control of his voice, Koyuki said something unbelievable.

“I’ve been waiting for you to give me an answer.”

“Wait, what?”

He took back what he’d said earlier.

It wasn’t just that things were moving too fast for him to keep up; he was honestly lost here.

Suddenly overcome by fatigue, Yuu let out a sigh.

‘It’ll be a pain if I don’t settle this once and for all…..’

He had to get this over with, and make his intentions clear.

From the very beginning, Koyuki probably wanted to know what Yuu’s feelings were.

“It doesn’t matter what you say. I won’t be confessing to Natsuki.”

Koyuki gasped, surprised, and then made a defeated face.

Yuu felt lightheaded seeing that reaction.

‘So he really was planning on convincing me to confess to her together….’

Without bothering to ask for his reasoning at this point, Yuu promptly turned away from him.

“See you tomorrow at school.”

Forcing those words out from his sore throat, he left the parking lot.

As he walked away, he didn’t hear any reply, nor any voice calling him back.

‘He’s changed… or rather, he doesn’t feel like he has to hide his intentions

anymore, probably.'

Even if he was wrong, this wasn't something he could tell Souta about, Yuu thought with a bitter laugh, and quickened his pace.

'And with this, summer really is over now….'

What kind of face was Koyuki making as he was left behind there?

All he could see was the glowing moon in the darkened sky.

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 6)

Here’s the sixth chapter of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks’ “**(Confession**

Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu”!

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

←Chapter 5 | Chapter 7→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

——-

Setoguchi Hina Birthday: August 8
Horoscope Sign: Leo
Blood Type: A

Yuu’s younger sister. Knows about Natsuki’s feelings and seems supportive of her….?

Always cheerful and positive.

——-

practice 6 “Ah, I can see the moon.”

In the empty classroom after school, Natsuki stared out the window while resting her chin in her hands.

Come to think of it, she remembered her teacher in modern Japanese class telling them things like, “The harvest moon this year was wonderful,” and “After the Autumnal Equinox, the length of day and night switch.”

It had become time to change from summer to winter school uniforms as well, switching out short sleeves for long sleeves as the weather got cooler.

‘I’d joke about how I’m the only one who hasn’t changed, but it’s not something to joke about…’

Turning away from the window, she turned on her cell phone, which she’d left lying on the desk.

Instead of a new message, she looked at the calendar with an upcoming

appointment. The results of the art contest that she'd submitted to at the end of summer vacation would be announced soon.

"I wonder if it'll just be the same as always…"

Frowning at her own comment, Natsuki laid her head down on the desk.

'My head feels like such a mess lately…'

After what had happened during summer vacation, things between Yuu and Natsuki had been awkward.

She hadn't been crying because something was going on between her and Koyuki, but because of how aggressive Yuu had been.

Just as she thought she'd cleared up that misunderstanding, Yuu had thrown another question at her.

"Then what about Ayase hugging you? What was that all about?"

When he asked that, she traced back her memory, but couldn't think of a proper answer. The only way to find out would probably be to ask Koyuki himself, the other party involved in this.

'I just told the truth… Although I didn't bring up Koyuki-kun directly, of course.'

However, Yuu hadn't been satisfied with that kind of answer, and ever since, he'd been acting cold.

'I couldn't possibly confess to him while things are like this…'

Glancing up, her eyes fell on Yuu's desk.

Checking that no one else was in the classroom, Natsuki slowly stood up.

"….He uses his desk to take notes, huh?"

Tracing the familiar handwriting with my finger, she let out a quiet laugh.

Although it was the exact same desk and chair as everyone else's, there were little things here and there that defined it as Yuu's.

"I guess it's okay for just a little while…"

Pretending not to notice her heartbeat quickening, she slowly pulled out

Yuu's chair.

Promising herself that it would only be for a minute, she sat down in his seat.

"Gosh, I feel like some kind of pervert doing this…"

"Natsuki? What're you doing?"

A voice called to her out of nowhere, and with a startled scream, Natsuki jumped up from the seat.

Standing in front of the door was, luckily enough, not the owner of the desk.

"H-Haruki? What's up? Did you forget something? Wait, this isn't even your class."

"Wow, good job on delivering your own punchline."

Haruki grinned, and gave a small salute.

Whether or not he noticed how flustered she was, the way he acted was the same as usual.

'It's okay. Maybe he didn't notice that this is Yuu's desk…'

"So Natsuki, what are you doing at Yuu's desk?"

As he bluntly called her out, Natsuki's face turned beet red.

Waving her hands around defensively, she stuttered out, "No, um, this isn't…"

Haruki gave a quiet, uninterested hum, and steadily came closer.

"Well, I just came to take back something I let him borrow. Excuse me."

Reaching inside Yuu's desk, he pulled out a thick dictionary. It was full of sticky notes, and the worn cover showed that it had been used a lot.

"….An English dictionary?"

"Mm, yeah. We got an extra assignment to do."

"Ahh! Right, Haruki, you've always been terrible at English, huh?"

"Shut up. I'm telling ya, I'll be totally fluent one of these days."

Natsuki let out a sigh at his usual joking reply.

But immediately after, Haruki asked her another direct question.

“And what about you? Those confession rehearsals… Still not ready for the real deal yet?”

“….W-Well…. about that….”

The very first person who had let her do a confession rehearsal had been none other than Haruki.

Even after her planned confession to Yuu had ended up as a rehearsal as well, Haruki still gave her advice numerous times afterwards while saying, “I won’t help you practice, but I’ll at least hear you out.”

He had given her valuable advice from a guy’s point of view.

‘But I can’t tell him about how bad things have been between us after what happened at the park.’

She had only told Haruki that they’d stopped doing confession rehearsals because she was busy with the contest deadline, but now that she was only waiting for the contest results to be announced, she couldn’t keep using that excuse anymore.

As Natsuki stood there unable to answer, Haruki shrugged helplessly.

“….Sorry to disappoint you.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it. It just means that you have your own timing, right? I’ll be rooting for you, so hurry up and confess like your life depends on it! Well, maybe I shouldn’t make that joke.”

“Haruki, that’s not funny.”

Even though she was being serious, Haruki burst out in laughter.

“….Just kidding. I shouldn’t be chastising others when I’m not much better.”

Haruki sat himself down on Yuu’s desk and looked up at her.

Natsu blinked, surprised to see her childhood friend smiling with self-mockery.

“Wait, I didn’t know that you had a crush on someone too!”

“Sure I do. Something wrong with that?”

As Haruki answered gruffly to hide his embarrassment, Natsuki shook her head violently.

“Of course not! I’m rooting for you too!”

“Well that was a quick response.”

Haruki pouted, but quickly returned to normal again.

‘I see. So Haruki has a crush, too…’

She hoped that Miou was the one he liked, but she hesitant to ask that herself.

So instead of asking who his crush was, she asked him about one more thing she was curious about.

“How come you haven’t confessed to her, then?”

“….I want to focus on finishing the movie, first.”

Using her childhood friend instincts, she knew that Haruki was lying.

Although, it felt more like he wasn’t telling the whole truth.

‘Guess I can’t force him to say why if he doesn’t want to.’

Just like Haruki had done earlier, Natsuki simply made a quiet humming noise of understanding.

“In that case, why not try doing a confession rehearsal?”

“….What?”

Haruki’s eyes widened, as if she’d just asked something outrageous.

Judging by his reaction, Natsuki realized he might misunderstand something, and quickly explained more clearly.

“I don’t mean with the girl you like, but….”

“Oh, you mean with you?”

As usual, Haruki was good at catching on, and when he helped her finish her thought, she nodded.

“Yeah! When I tried actually confessing, even if it ended up being just practice in the end, I was really nervous. And after I told him I liked him…”

Her heart started beating noisily as the memories from that time resurfaced.

Natsuki placed a hand on top of her cardigan, where her heart was, and smiled at Haruki.

“I’m thinking of confessing to him for real next time.”

“…Really? Good for you.”

Haruki showed a soft smile.

It was a gentle smile, as if he had someone in mind, as well.

‘I didn’t think he could make that kind of face before… I hope things work out for him.’

No matter who it was that he liked, Natsuki promised herself that she would support him.

Of course, she was rooting for Miou too, but this was a different matter; she just genuinely wanted Haruki’s feelings to reach, no matter who was on the receiving end.

Haruki, who had decided to do the confession rehearsal, started practicing quietly to himself straight away.

He mumbled to himself over and over, trying to think of the right words to confess with.

‘I guess I’ll wait out on the veranda so I don’t break his concentration.’

As Natsuki started walking to the window in the back of the room, she was called to a stop by a serious voice.

“Sorry to make you wait. I’m ready now, so whenever you are too.”

“Ah, okay….”

Haruki looked more nervous than she’d ever seen him before.

Watching him, Natsuki’s heart started beating noisily, as well.

‘Even though I know it’s just for practice, this is making me nervous, too…’

One step at a time, Haruki closed the distance between them.

Natsuki looked down unconsciously, and stared at his shoes as he came closer.

“….Hey—”

His trembling voice echoed in her eardrums.

She finally brought herself to look up, and saw that his face was a brighter red than even the sunset outside.

“You might be misunderstanding something, but that girl’s not the one I like…”

Haruki took a deep breath before continuing.

“I like you!”

In the next moment, they heard a loud thunk sound, and the door shook.

Startled, Natsuki and Haruki turned around, but they didn’t see anyone there.

“….Guess it was just the wind.”

“Probably.”

Her heart was beating even faster from the shock over the sudden noise.

She nervously put a hand on top of her chest, and saw that Haruki was doing the exact same thing in front of her.

Looking at each other, they both burst out laughing.

“Damn, I never thought confessing was so nerve-wracking.”

“Ah, come to think of it, Haruki, is this your first time confessing?”

“Yeah. I’m usually the one that’s always being confessed to.”

“What? Well if you say so~”

Haruki burst out laughing at Natsuki’s comeback.

Natsuki started laughing too, and their anxiety from earlier completely disappeared.

‘….Haruki looks a bit different now.’

Something inside of him must have changed somehow.

I’m sure that I’ve also changed in a way, Natsuki thought to herself.

‘I have to find the courage, too…’

Clenching her fists, she made a declaration out loud.

“If I earn a prize in the contest, this time… I’ll confess to Yuu for real.”

Haruki raised his eyebrows at Natsuki’s determination.

He looked at her curiously, but in the end, he didn’t say anything in response.

Thinking back on it now, her childhood friend, who was always so quick-witted, must have seen how things would turn out after this.

For both Natsuki, and for himself.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

The poorly-fitted door of the clubroom was thrown wide open with more force than ever before.

Startled, Yuu looked up to see Souta breathing heavily.

His face was bright red, as if he’d just sprinted all the way here.

“That was quick. Wait, Haruki isn’t with you?”

Ten minutes ago, Souta had gone to look for Haruki, who still hadn’t come back from going to the vending machines.

It was a pain, and a huge one at that, to go around aimlessly look for someone, so that was why Yuu hadn’t expected him to come back for a while. However, today he’d come back a lot earlier than usual.

“O-Okay, I have to tell you something, so stay calm, alright?”

With how panicked he looked, Yuu wanted to tell Souta, “You should calm yourself down, first,” but he simply nodded.

As Souta tried to catch his breath, he pointed at the floor with a shaking hand.

“J-Just now, in the classroom… I-I saw Haruki! C-Confessing to Natsuki…”

For a moment, Yuu forgot how to breathe.

His heart beat violently from the sudden lack of oxygen.

‘What the hell…?’

He betrayed me. No way. What is he thinking?

The words that raced through his mind were all full of anger.

However, a voice in his head immediately argued, “Isn’t Haruki free to do whatever he wants?”

Who ever said he wasn’t allowed to confess to Natsuki?

Unable to answer this question, all that remained in the end was his disappointment at himself.

‘As I thought, it’s impossible for me to watch over Natsuki.’

The vow he had made to Koyuki had fallen apart all too soon. There was no denying the sudden urge to want to press Haruki for answers.

‘But then, what am I supposed to do…?’

Finally giving into his annoyance,Yuu tore at his hair in frustration.

Brought back to reality by the pain, he clicked in tongue with pent-up anger and cursed under his breath.

“Damn it…”

“….You know, Yuu, it’s kind of like you’re a jack of all trades but master of none.”

Souta, who was breathing normally again, quietly muttered this.

Uncertain of what he meant by this statement, Yuu could only reply vaguely with “Huh?”

Souta shrugged his shoulders, and spoke in a somehow accusing tone.

“Getting annoyed, clicking your tongue, pulling at your hair, and then you just give up? Why not just scream out how you’re feeling? Like, ‘You’ve gotta be kidding me!’ or something. Are you that scared of showing your emotions?”

The words he spoke were the most sharp and straightforward that he'd ever heard from Souta.

A sharp pain stabbed straight at his heart. More than the frustration from earlier, the pain in this moment was what made him want to scream out loud.

But even still, Yuu held back the urge to do so.

He bit down on his tongue, and stared back at Souta.

"….Even if I do that, it won't change what's already happened."

"Maybe you're right, but what will happen to your feelings now that they have nowhere to go?"

"Who knows? They'll probably just fade away eventually."

Souta clearly wasn't buying Yuu's careless answer.

"They won't fade away. They'll just pile up in the bottom of your heart. It's kind of sad that those feelings are being ignored by their own owner."

This time, it really felt like his heart might stop beating. Pierced by Souta's words, his breathing dwindled to a faint whisper.

"….Then, what am I supposed to do…"

When he mustered out those words, his voice shook like he was in tears, making his heart scream out again.

Unable to raise his face, Yuu slumped weakly.

'I'm so pathetic…'

Not knowing what the other thought of the sight of him, he heard footsteps drawing near.

He braced himself, but Souta remained silent.

Eventually, he heard the sound of the scattered papers on the long desk being gathered up.

"If it were me, I'd write the things I was feeling right now into a script."

"….Huh?"

Taken aback by words coming from an unexpected direction, Yuu looked up.

Souta laughed quietly, and then started writing on the paper with a mechanical pencil.

He seemed to writing things down as they came to mind, his hand darting across the paper in bold, quick movements. He stopped now and then to underline things, and add words here and there.

Staring at his work for a moment, Souta suddenly spoke up as if remembering something.

"Starting now, I'm just going to be talking to myself, so ignore me,"

He said, and without waiting for Yuu's reply, began talking indifferently.

"I'm hoping to get into university by recommendation. That's why I've been talking a lot with the guidance counselor, Handa-sensei…. and I heard him say that Haruki might be studying at a university in America."

"What?"

Yuu said suddenly in a raspy voice.

However, Souta just continued "talking to himself" without looking up at him.

"Other than the one for the club, I heard that Haruki filmed another short movie on his own. Apparently, he entered it in a competition, and it did really well. He got awarded prize money… as well as a scholarship to study abroad…."

Souta suddenly got quiet after that, as if he'd lost the will to talk anymore.

But even then, he didn't stop writing, and Yuu found himself just staring in admiration.

"….As for me, I still haven't found anything like that to be passionate about."

Did he mean Haruki, or Souta?

He didn't really know at the time, but it was probably both.

He always hated himself for being nothing special, and filled himself with anxiety.

Whether or not he knew this, Souta spoke up immediately after.

“There you go again… Saying things like that and putting yourself down.”

“No, but it’s the truth…”

Souta’s hand stopped moving suddenly, and he looked straight at Yuu.

“It’s because of you giving me that push from behind that I can write scripts like this now.”

Although he said this, Yuu had no recollection of it.

Noticing his confused gaze, Souta puffed out his cheeks and asked, “You don’t remember?”

“I don’t have natural talent like Haruki does, and I’m not good at handling schedules like you do, or managing a lot of people to work together…. The most I can do is just run errands.”

Yuu’s breath caught as he listened to Souta speak as if reading off a script.

“Didn’t you say something like this this last year, too…?”

Souta’s face brightened up at that, but then drooped a moment later. He shrugged his shoulders, and sighed in exasperation.

“You’re so slow~ At this rate, you probably don’t even remember the things you say yourself.”

As Souta threw a glance at him, Yuu answered with a wry smile.

“What’re you talking about? You have talent with script writing, Mochita.”

Although he was only saying the same line as back then, he felt a strange warmth in his heart.

As he stared back at Souta, this time, he had a wide grin on his face.

“I’m just a perfectly normal person, with nothing special in particular. But even for someone like me, there was a speck of talent, so I’m sure that there’s something for you too, Yuu.”

“….I’ll try looking for it.”

Even if he couldn’t find the answer right away, he wouldn’t despair like this anymore.

And even if Haruki returned before long, he wouldn't act disgracefully and blow up in anger.

'Mochita was trying to help me understand it in a roundabout way…'

It was because he didn't have the confidence in himself to keep his emotions in check, or face Haruki directly.

If he had to admit it, the inferiority complex that he'd been dealing with for so long didn't feel like such a big deal either, strangely enough. It was probably like being afraid of a ghost that you couldn't even see.

On the other hand, it was like he'd tried not to see it from the start.

Once he realized this, he could no longer look away.

'The real reason I couldn't confess to Natsuki is… probably…'

Their relationship as childhood friends that had never changed.

Their everlasting bond, would it remain unchanged from now on, as well?

It wouldn't be long before he would have to make that decision.

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 7)

Thanks for waiting! Here’s the seventh chapter of the novel adaption of

HoneyWorks' "**(Confession Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu**"! A lot has happened, but Natsuki is finally starting to realize what she really wants to do.

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

←Chapter 6 | Chapter 8→

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

——-

Aida Miou

Birthday: March 3
Horoscope Sign: Pisces
Blood Type: A

A close friend of Natsuki's. In the Art Club. Trustworthy, as well as a hard worker. Seems to get along well with Haruki.

——-

practice 7

The road from the school to the station had just the right amount of incline for a marathon.

But unless it was for P.E. class or they were late for school, no one would ever think of running there.

In fact, it was Natsuki's first time sprinting full speed for a reason other than those mentioned above.

'N-No one's… come after me… right?'

She hesitantly looked behind her, but she couldn't see anyone.

The flood of students leaving school had dispersed, so there wasn't anyone in front of her, either.

She was only able to relax for a moment before a shock suddenly ran through her knees.

“W-Woah….!”

Her legs tangled together, and Natsuki was forced to make an abrupt stop.

The momentum made one of her loafers come off, but without any vigor or stamina left to hop back to her shoe, she simply walked back to it, letting the sock on her shoeless foot touch the ground.

“….G-Good thing no one saw that….”

Honestly, that was just way too lame.

While suffering a bit of a blow to her spirit, she managed to pick her loafer back up.

“Aww, looks like I’ll have to wash the inside once I get home…”

Were loafers even washable? Just thinking about the time and effort needed to find that out gave her a headache.

Still, it wasn’t like she could just go home with only her left shoe on.

As she bent down to put her loafer back on, sweat dripped down from her forehead and into her eyes.

She tried wiping it away with her cardigan sleeve, but her forehead was still sweaty. Her shirt was also damp with sweat, and clung uncomfortably to her back.

“Ugh, it’s just one thing after another…”

As she took out a towel from her bag, she looked up at clear, autumn sky with a sigh.

“….The sky is so high up…”

The air in autumn was different from summer, and her lungs stung a bit when she inhaled.

Soon, the back of her nose started to tingle too, and she quickly patted her cheeks with both hands.

‘If it’s so frustrating that you want to cry, you should have just tried harder…’

She bit down on her lip, and mentally scolded herself.

It didn't seem like she'd be able to go by the saying, "No use crying over spilled milk," today.

She remembered what had happened in the classroom earlier.

The moment she'd entered the art room, their adviser, Matsukawa-sensei, had a wide smile spread on her face.

Just as she started to wonder why, Matsukawa-sensei's cheerful voice rang out through the room.

"Hayasaka-san, Aida-san, congratulations!"

She didn't even need to hear the rest to know that it was to announce that the two had won prizes in the contest. Akari's entry had been chosen for the Grand Prize, and Miou's entry had been given an Honorable Mention.

The written notice with the contest results was hung up, and half-unconsciously, Natsuki scanned it for her name.

As she tried looking a second time, she realized what a poor sport she was being, and let out a forced laugh.

'No matter how many times I look, my name isn't going to be there…'

She felt a slight pain in her bottom lip.

She'd bitten down without realizing it, and the faint taste of iron spread through her mouth.

'Huh? Why am I acting like this? Shouldn't I be used to this by now…?'

Surprised by her own reaction, Natsuki stepped back from the circle of people surrounding the notice.

She didn't think that she would be this disappointed.This wasn't her first time being rejected, and she'd never placed a prize before, anyway.

"Senpai, congratulations. I knew that you would get picked!"

"Looks like you were able to keep your winning streak~"

"Come to think of, wasn't there also a time when the President and Vice President took 1st and 2nd place together?"

She could hear the voices of the underclassmen congratulating Akari and Miou a distance away.

Natsuki thought about joining them, but she realized that her facial expression seemed frozen in place.

Her expression drooped, and she couldn't lift the corners of her mouth. If she tried congratulating the two like this, it would only worry them.

'I need to get out of here…. I should just go home for today.'

Natsuki quickly made up her mind, grabbed her bag, and headed straight for the door.

However, they must have heard her footsteps, as Akari and Miou soon called after her.

"Nacchan? Where're you going?"

Akari sounded surprised. As much as possible, Natsuki replied in a way that made it sound like she was in a hurry.

"Dentist appointment! I forgot that it got moved to an earlier date."

Akari and Miou seemed like they still wanted to say something, but Natsuki pretended like she hadn't noticed and shouted back,

"Sorry, I gotta go!"

For the time being, Natsuki just wanted to get away from there, and focused on running as fast as she could.

She knew that no one was following her, but she was scared to look anywhere else but down.

'….What did I even want to do?'

If she earned a prize in the contest, she would confess to Yuu.

That was what she had declared in front of Haruki, but it hadn't been like a hopeful prayer or anything.

She'd simply wanted the courage to confess to him. If she could just get a little confidence boost, instead of being modest about it, she thought that she'd be able to proudly tell him her feelings.

‘But even that isn’t going to happen anymore…’

“Nacchan!”

Just as her eyes started to burn with oncoming tears, she heard someone call out her name from behind.

She thought about running again, pretending that she hadn’t heard them, but she couldn’t move. It was as if her feet had been sewn into the ground.

“I’m so glad… I caught up to you…. I thought I’d go home with you.”

Although she was gasping for breath, Akari’s voice sounded cheerful.

‘Why…? Why won’t you just let me be by myself?’

Natsuki desperately held back the urge to scream, and instead, answered like she usually would.

“….Just you? Where’s Miou?”

“Serizawa-kun came looking for her, and she went to go help out the Film Club.”

“I see….”

“Yeah.”

It was only one word, but she felt like Akari’s voice had suddenly lost its cheerfulness.

Right as she started to wonder why, glossy black hair flitted into her vision. Akari’s long hair fluttered as she came around to stand in front of Natsuki.

As Natsuki stared blankly at her picturesque figure, Akari’s large, dark eyes focused on her.

“Nacchan, when are you going to confess to Setoguchi-kun?”

At first, she couldn’t comprehend what she’d just heard.

When Akari saw Natsuki gaping with her mouth hanging open, she tilted her head.

“Hm? Did you start going out with Ayase-kun?”

This time, her jaw literally dropped at the unexpected question.

Anger gradually started to build up, and it felt like she might explode with her emotions loose right then and there.

“…Akari, why would you ask something like that? What does that have to do with anything?”

Natsuki held back the urge to scream, and spoke as calmly as she could.

After all the advice that Akari had given her up until that point, this was a really terrible thing for her to say, she thought. But even so, there was a part of her that didn’t want to admit it.

Akari looked down sadly, and spoke in a glum tone that she never used.

“I don’t really understand you, Nacchan… You like Setoguchi-kun, and even though you said you’d confess to him for real instead of doing more rehearsals, didn’t you go on a date with Ayase-kun?”

Natsuki passed her limit all too soon, and she shouted back reflexively.

“I already said before, that wasn’t a date!”

“Miou-chan told me that Ayase-kun probably intended it as a date.”

“Wha….?!”

As she was suddenly confronted by the reality that she’d been avoiding, her vision flashed red.

When even Miou was brought into this, her dried eyes started to blur again.

‘Come on, keep it together! You’ll make her think that you’re crying because she guessed right.’

The harder she tried to control her tear ducts, the more difficult it became, so as a last resort, she turned her face away from Akari.

“….I don’t know anything about that. Honestly, Koyuki-kun didn’t say anything….”

“Nacchan, that’s not fair! Are you going to pretend you don’t care about Serizawa-kun either?”

Akari’s quivering voice interrupted Natsuki as she sounded like she was going to make more excuses.

‘No way, Akari’s… crying…?’

She looked over in confusion, and saw an expression she’d never seen on her friend’s face before.

Akari always smiled; she couldn’t remember a time she’d ever seen her angry or cry.

Other girls made fun of her, calling her overly optimistic, but Natsuki and Miou knew better. It was because Akari was too nice that she smiled all the time, because she never wanted to bother anyone or make them sad.

‘That’s right. That’s the kind of person Akari is…’

There had been a time when Natsuki had also thought of her the same way the other girls did. She even went as far as to think that she was always smiling because she was trying to earn points with people.

But as she got to know her, she realized that it was simply because Akari was a nice person.

‘There are times when she acts too much like an airhead, but I guess that’s just how honest she really is.’

Even now, Akari was giving a just and sound argument.

She was asking these questions because she felt something was off, and she wanted to understand.

‘….I have to face her.’

Natsuki clenched her fists, and began to speak to Akari, whose eyes were red from crying.

“I’ll admit that I acted unfairly about some things, but what did you mean about Haruki…?”

Akari sniffed and mumbled,

“Natsuki-chan, you were the only one that he said he liked.”

“….Eh?”

When she heard those words, her head went into shock, like she’d just been punched.

‘Could it be that… Akari heard Haruki’s confession rehearsal…?’

Just as she was about to clear it up as a misunderstanding, she stopped short.

She had no idea about how to prove that that had been a confession rehearsal. As the one who Haruki had rehearsed with, all she could do was try to convince Akari, the third party in this.

‘I wonder if she’ll believe me if I just explain it honestly.’

“Listen, Akari…”

She must have thought that Natsuki was about to say some kind of excuse, and shook her head to shut her out.

“Nacchan, just be honest and tell me the truth. Because in the end, he never said he liked my drawings, or Miou-chan’s either, you know?”

“…..Huh?”

Realizing that she sounded like an idiot saying that and nothing more, Natsuki quickly closed her mouth.

Akari furrowed her eyebrows together with a pout, and then expressed her thoughts fervently.

“As I was drawing the pictures to be used in the movie, I thought about a lot of things. I wondered, what is love? What kind of feeling is it? And then I realized that, for me, it’s the same as when I’m drawing, or I’m looking at a drawing that I like.”

‘Then, in other words, that means…’

Although her head was swimming in confusion, Natsuki tried her hardest to think, and soon came to one conclusion.

“From your point of view, because Haruki said that he liked my drawings, you think that…”

“He likes you, right?”

“S-So that’s what it was…..”

Suddenly feeling faint, Natsuki sunk down weakly into a crouching position.

“Hm? Was there something else?”

As Akari bent down to peer into Natsuki’s face, her eyes shone mischievously.

‘Then, does that mean she heard the rehearsal after all?’

She opened her mouth to ask her about it, but the words that came out were something entirely different.

“….Hey, Akari, what do you think about my drawings?”

“I like them. A lot.”

After answering, Akari blinked in surprise at herself with a, “Huh?!”

Natsuki was also embarrassed as how quickly she’d replied, but she smiled back at her.

“…I like your drawings too, Akari. I admire that unique atmosphere it has. And I like Miou’s delicate, and detailed drawings, too. I want to look at them forever.”

It gradually became more embarrassing to talk, and halfway through, she ended up speaking very quickly.

However, Akari seemed like she was able to hear everything clearly, and her face lit up.

“Nacchan! Nacchaaan!”

“Wahh?! Hey, Akari, I can’t breathe….!”

Akari’s slender arms wrapped around Natsuki’s neck while she was still crouching down.

‘It’s sweet… Smells like peaches…’

Just as she was about to lose focus, the grip of Akari’s arms tightened.

Although they looked thin, they’d been toughened up by carrying heavy canvases and art supplies when she bought them in bulk. Being hugged so tightly by these arms made tears come to her eyes again, but for a reason that was different from before.

“….I’m sorry for saying things like I did.”

Akari whispered in her ear with a shaky voice.

Natsuki felt something damp on her shoulder, and silently shook her head.

“No, I’m the one that’s really sorry.”

Wrapped in the scent of peaches, Natsuki slowly closed her eyes.

‘I’ll have to ask her what shampoo she uses later…’

She’d ask for the brand, and then they maybe they could go out and buy it together.

And, of course, they’d invite Miou to come along, too.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Feeling fatigued, like she’d just swam several laps in the pool, Natsuki leaned her head against the window in the train.

‘I wonder if Akari made it in time…’

Natsuki looked towards the bus terminal in front of the station to search for her friend, who had gone there after seeing Natsuki off before she boarded the train. But the bus must have already departed, since she couldn’t see the bus oor Akari anywhere.

‘Maybe I should text her to make sure.’

She reached into her cardigan pocket and took out her cell phone.

Just as she was about to open it, she realized that the light indicating a new message was on.

‘Shoot, I didn’t even notice….’

Hoping that it wasn’t anything urgent, she quickly opened her inbox.

Along with several newsletters, there was a text from Miou.

“Akari-chan went after you. Were you able to meet her?

Let’s all go home together again tomorrow.

Good luck at the dentist!”

When she read the message in Miou’s gentle voice, she wasn’t able to hold

back the fresh tears that sprung up and her vision became blurry again.

Natsuki rubbed at her eyes with her cardigan sleeve, and hovered her hands over the keys of her phone to type a reply.

However, she hesitated for a long time to bring up the "new message" screen.

'Going home with the three of us tomorrow…? So Miou isn't going to walk home with Haruki anymore?'

From what Natsuki had heard, after the contest had ended, this time it was Haruki who had told Miou that he couldn't walk home with her. Apparently, it was because they were busy with finishing up the movie, but she had a feeling that wasn't the only reason.

'It's only a feeling I have, though….'

She couldn't keep still because she knew that Haruki planned to confess to someone.

'Who could it be….? But I already decided that I'd support him no matter who it is!'

She leaned her head against the glass window with a thunk, and tried not to overthink it.

After all, she promised herself that she'd root for him without butting in.

Suddenly, her cell phone vibrated in her hand.

Coming to with a start, Natsuki slowly looked down at her phone.

"Huh? Koyuki-kun?"

Surprised at who the sender was, she spoke out loud on accident.

Her voice echoed throughout the mostly-empty vehicle, as it was still early in the day, but luckily, no one paid her much attention.

Placing a hand over her chest with a sigh of relief, Natsuki turned back to her phone and opened up the text.

"I'll be waiting at the park."

There was no subject line, with only a single sentence in the body, and not

even a specified time. It hardly seemed like Koyuki at all, who usually wrote so methodically and politely, and she had to double check the sender name to be sure.

However, the text had definitely been sent by Koyuki, leaving Natsuki at a loss.

'It'd be better if I just went, right….?'

She could always just make up an excuse, saying that she hadn't noticed the text because her phone had run out of battery, or that she'd fallen asleep.

Or should she reply, and find out what he wanted, first?

However, she was a bit reluctant to do either.

'Even if I try asking over a text, I doubt that Koyuki-kun will just answer honestly.'

Of course, this was just another gut feeling that she had, but somehow, it seemed reasonable.

There were about two minutes until the nearest station. And from there, it would take ten minutes to walk to the park.

She typed in her reply that she would be there in about ten minutes, and closing her eyes, she hit the "send" button.

Koyuki immediately sent back a reply saying, "Thank you," and her heart started to pound.

'I wonder what Koyuki-kun wants to talk to me about. If… If it's a confession, then….'

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Koyuki was sitting on a park bench, and watching some stray cats play with each other.

Seeing the peaceful look on his face helped her nerves unwind a bit, making it more natural to speak in her usual cheery voice.

"Koyuki-kun, sorry to have made you wait."

"Oh, not at all! I'm sorry for calling you out here so suddenly."

Koyuki stood up from the bench and bowed to Natsuki in apology.

She found herself strangely admiring how polite he could be even in a casual setting like this one.

"….We haven't had the chance to talk alone like this since that day, right?"

'Straight to the punch!'

Feeling her heartbeat speed up, Natsuki clumsily nodded.

"At school, I always feel like Setoguchi-kun's keeping an eye on me… But, I guess you reap what you sow."

Unsure of how to respond, she could only shake her head silently.

It was obvious that Yuu and Koyuki were keeping a distance from each other.

They hadn't been particularly close before, either, but whenever he joined Natsuki to talk with Koyuki about manga, he would casually make friendly jokes. But after what had happened that summer day, things had changed dramatically, and it was difficult for them to even speak to each other as classmates.

"I'm sorry for how Yuu acted before. I already cleared up the misunderstanding, so if you two just have the chance to talk again, then…"

Just as she was reassuring him that things between and Yuu would be fine now, she trailed off suddenly when she noticed that Koyuki was looking at her with a sad look in his eyes.

For a moment, she thought she might have said something to upset him, but nothing came to mind.

Throwing him a confused look, Koyuki muttered something.

"….It wasn't."

"Huh? Sorry, I couldn't hear you…."

"What would you do if I said it wasn't Setoguchi-kun's misunderstanding?"

The previous sadness in Koyuki's eyes faded, and they now shone with an earnest light.

He was staring straight at her, as if probing the inside of her mind, and it made her uncomfortable.

But, that was it.

Once she took a deep breath, she was able to organize her thoughts again.

'I feel like Koyuki-kun is always trying to hide what he really means….'

She faintly recalled how Akari had confronted her directly. Compared to her, it felt like he was sidestepping around the actual topic.

"Is that what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Um, well, that was just a hypothetical question…."

Trailing off into silence, Koyuki finally bowed his head.

As she watched his shoulders drop helplessly, Natsuki then said something unexpected.

"You know, you're kind of like me, Koyuki-kun."

Natsuki's eyes widened, surprised at what she had just said.

Koyuki also looked up, and stared at her in confusion.

'Why do I think he's like me? Is it because he hides what he really wants to say, and speaks with "if's"….?'

As she thought it over in her head, the answer suddenly came to her.

Instead of confessing for real, Natsuki had chosen to do confession rehearsals.

Hiding his real intentions, Koyuki made up scenarios to ask about her feelings.

They were similar in that neither of them had the courage to face things directly.

They were also similar in how they tried to deny that fact.

"….I'm going to tell you something about me,"

Natsuki started off, and started to talk about the answer that she'd just realized.

"I've never had much self-confidence. I just desperately wanted something,

anything, where I could say, 'Yes! This is me!' That was why I entered the art contest, but even then, I prepared myself for the worst."

As she spoke, Koyuki listened to her attentively, without even blinking.

Encouraged by this, she revealed the feelings that she'd been keeping in her chest.

"I really wanted to earn a prize this time, but in reality, I was barely making progress with the piece I was submitting. I think I probably had it all planned out in my head somehow, and I'd prepared an excuse like, 'I just didn't win anything because I didn't give it my all.' Unlike me, Akari and Miou really tried their best…."

Speaking out loud like this, the feelings that she'd shut away started to reveal themselves.

Surprisingly, there was still a ray of light remaining at the bottom of the box that she'd locked away.

"I thought that I just wanted something—anything at all, just something that could give me more confidence, but I realized that it couldn't just be anything. I realized that when there's something that you really want to do, there's no point unless you do it until you're satisfied with it."

'I see, so this is how I really felt.'

When she'd found out that she hadn't won anything in the contest, she didn't feel sad that her piece hadn't gotten a good evaluation.

She just felt discouraged, thinking that she wasn't good enough.

In the end, she'd only entered the contest because she wanted something absolute, like to be praised by someone.

"Enomoto-san, what do you really want to do?"

Koyuki asked her in a very quiet voice, like a still and tranquil sea.

He spoke in the way he always had; it didn't feel like he was trying to pry her for answers or anything. She could tell that he asked purely because he wanted to know.

Natsuki brought her index finger to her lips and grinned.

“I haven’t told anyone else yet. Can you keep it a secret for me until it’s ready?”

“Of course. After all, I li—…. I support you, Enomoto-san.”

Koyuki carefully chose which words to use, and then smiled at her.

Natsuki nodded in return, and spoke her newly-found dream out loud.

“What I really want to do is—”

Confession Rehearsal Novel (Chapter 8 & epilogue)

Merry Christmas!

My gift(s) to you all are the final two chapters of the novel adaption of HoneyWorks' "**(Confession Rehearsal) Kokuhaku Yokou Renshuu**"! (Sorry for the long wait) The day that Natsuki had been preparing herself for is finally here…!

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found here.
You can find the masterpost with all the Confession Rehearsal/Sound of Confession Project-related translations here.

Thank you for reading! Enjoy!

←Chapter 7

＊If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at Amazon!

——

Serizawa Haruki

Birthday: April 5
Horoscope Sign: Ram
Blood Type: A

Natsuki's childhood friend. In the Film Club. The mischievous older brother type. Makes movies in excellent taste.

——

practice 8

Patience, don't rush.

Muttering the words under her breath like a spell, Natsuki was intent on keeping her hand moving.

Finally, together with the sound of the minute hand overlapping with the hour hand, she let go of the tone cutter in her hand.

"I-I finished~!"

Done with all the work at last, she collapsed on her bed.

Her shoulders and arms ached from the overuse over these consecutive days, but now that she was finally able to give them a rest, the pain felt dulled.

Strangely, even the fatigue felt like relief to her.

Moving only her neck, she looked over at the clock on top of her desk.

It felt like it was around midnight, but to her surprise, it was about two hours later than she'd thought.

'Ack, when did it get this late….'

She was shocked at how fast time had gone by, and also impressed by how focused she'd been.

She'd do what she really wanted to do, and find confidence in herself.

That was what she'd promised herself, but it had been a lot more work than she'd expected.

In any case, she'd had Koyuki read her manuscript. Since he usually read a lot of manga, all of his advice had been a great help. And more than anything, he had cared like it was his own work, and she felt that it was thanks to his encouragement that she was able to keep drawing.

'Once it's morning, first I'll send a text to the three of them….'

As she thought about how she'd announce it to them, another face popped up in the back of her mind.

'Maybe I should tell Haruki too, since we've both done confession rehearsals.'

It had been the day before the contest results had been announced that Natsuki had done the confession rehearsal with Haruki in the classroom after school, so that would make it two weeks since then.

Even though there were only a few days left in October now, it still didn't look like Haruki had confessed to anyone.

'Knowing him, he probably has some reason why he hasn't, though.'

Remembering how surprised her childhood friend had been about how much courage he'd needed just to practice confessing, it was very possible that he hadn't been able to take that final step.

'If I'm able to set a good example here, will I be able to give Haruki that push

he needs?'

And then he'd be thankful to her, and maybe start being a little nicer to her?

No, he'd probably just scoff at her and say that it was none of her business.

Unable to cool down at all, whimsical thoughts kept popping up one after another in her head.

Natsuki rolled on top of her sheets, flipping over from stomach to lie on her back.

"….I wonder if Yuu's already asleep."

Suddenly curious, she quietly rushed over to the window.

Careful not to make a sound, she opened the curtains to look at the house next door.

Seeing a faint light from the window of the corner room of the second floor, it appeared that Yuu was still up studying.

"Wow, you're at it all night tonight, too…."

Before, she would have texted him to tell him that, but now, she only mumbled it to herself. Ever since what had happened over the summer, the invisible wall that had formed still towered between them.

'But, once tomorrow comes….'

She'd knock down that invisible wall and go to see him.

And this time, it wouldn't be a rehearsal; she would confess to him for real.

"You'd better be ready for me, Yuu!"

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Nacchan, there's a bunny in your bento!"

Akari's eyes sparkled when she looked at the apple in Natsuki's bento box that was spread out across the long table in the art preparation room.

"Today's the decisive battle, so I begged my mom to make it for me!"

Natsuki raised a tightly clenched fist and nodded proudly.

Hearing the words “decisive battle,” Miou paused in the middle of eating her sandwich.

“C-come to think of it, you would always have one whenever there was an exam or something, right….?”

“Ahaha! Miou, how come you’re the one sounding so nervous?”

Natsuki burst out laughing, and before long, Akari and Miou started laughing along with her.

During the lunch break, Natsuki had asked their advisor, Matsukawa-sensei, if they could check out the preparation room.

Since she had to teach the art elective class during fifth and sixth period, Matsukawa-sensei had quickly unlocked the room for her.

‘Sorry, Eri-chan-sensei! I just really wanted to prepare myself for this!’

Friday afternoons were electives, and naturally, Natsuki and the others chose art.

Yuu usually chose to go home early on Fridays, but due to the deadlines for the film club, lately, he would often stay until the last school bell.

But Natsuki had still sent him a text that morning just in case they ended up missing each other.

“Honestly, I was so shocked when I saw your text.”

“Saying something like, ‘I finished the manga, so I’ll be confessing today,’ right?”

Seeing Akari and Miou nod in agreement, Natsuki tilted her head.

“Huh? How come? Didn’t I already tell you guys that I’d confess for real once I finished it?”

“Geez, Nacchan!”

“Yes?”

Akari, who was sitting in front of her, suddenly called Natsuki’s name with a stern look on her face and leaned forward.

She then pointed directly below Natsuki's eyes.

"You haven't been sleeping enough, have you? So I was thinking it might be better if you put off the confession to another day…"

"Both Akari and I can only cheer you on from the sidelines, so we're worried, you know?"

Before she'd noticed, Miou, who was sitting beside her, was looking at her with a serious expression, as well.

Her vision started to blur from the tears that sprang up at the two's kindness.

"…Akari, Miou, thank you so much. I'll… I'll do my best!"

"Nacchan, we'll be rooting for you!"

Akari grabbed her hand and started muttering chants under her breath as if to give her blessings.

Seeing this, Miou also extended her hand, and said with a determined expression that she rarely ever used.

"I also looked up ways with help with nerves, so if you're worried, just tell me."

"Miou-chan, prepared as always! It'd be a real disaster if she confessed to the wrong person because she was so nervous!"

"…I don't think you can blame that on nerves. That's just called being careless."

Miou made a sharp retort to Akari's air-headed joke.

It was just a silly exchange, but Natsuki felt her shoulders easing up.

'It's like they're telling me to just act like I usually would, just like they're doing right now.'

It was great that she was pumped up for the real confession today, but she may have gotten a little too worked up over it.

Feeling more thankful towards her friends than any words could possibly express, Natsuki posed with her forefinger and thumb sticking out.

“It’ll be fine! After all, today’s horoscope said that Cancer was the most favorable sign!”

While Natsuki had a wide grin on her face, as if to show her confidence in choosing this day in particular, the others showed no reaction whatsoever.

After a short silence, Akari and Miou gingerly asked,

“So, could it be, the reason that you chose to confess today…”

“Was because your sign was the most favorable in today’s horoscope reading…?”

“Yep, that’s right!”

The horoscope on the “Morning News” was usually always right. For Natsuki, there was nothing more dependable than that.

‘Huh? They’re still not showing any reaction…’

Were they worried because it seemed like she was only relying on the horoscope?

‘Well, in that case…’

Natsuki pulled out a plump pouch from her bag.

“Naturally, I made sure to have a counter-plan for my lack of sleep, too. Tada!”

When she opened the pouch, things like mascara and lip gloss came pouring out. And just in case the cosmetics that she owned weren’t enough, she’d also packed things that she’d secretly borrowed from her mom, as well.

“I can hide my bags, and if I make my eyelashes all curly, too, I’ll be good to go!”

As Natsuki hurriedly pulled the cap off of the mascara, the two seemed to break free from their paralysis and shouted,

“Hold on! You have to wash your face first!”

“And don’t forget the foundation, too! Actually, you’ll be fine with just using powder!!”

As Akari and Miou's shouts echoed around, sadly, the bell signaling the end of the lunch break chimed.

As the promised hour drew closer by the second, all Natsuki could hear was the pounding of her own heart.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

In the hushed classroom, Yuu sat alone with a stack of documents.

The sunlight streaming in from the window warmed his back, making it seem like the first day of winter was still far off instead of just around the corner.

'Guess one of the few good things about our classroom is that it gets a lot of sun, I guess.'

The Film Club, which wasn't even three years old yet, was Sakuragaoka High School's newest club.

The only empty classroom that was available was at the end of the hall on the highest floor, making it a little difficult to access. And on top of it all, it was currently being used as a storeroom.

After a bit of work, which Natsuki had lent a hand with, they'd managed to shape it into the club room that it was now.

'…Come to think of it, Natsuki slept during class again today.'

For the past few days, it seemed like she hadn't been getting enough sleep, and there'd often be dark circles under her eyes.

He'd assumed that she was pulling all-nighters to prepare for recommendations and entrance exams, but even when they were only waiting for the acceptance letters now, the bags under her eyes showed no signs of fading in the slightest.

'I could find out right away if I just asked her in person, but…'

Ever since he'd heard from Souta that Haruki had confessed to Natsuki, he'd done all he could to put distance between them. Whether it was because of jealousy or out of spite, this was just something that he'd decided to do until he felt confident with himself.

‘Still, I can’t help but be curious about how Haruki’s confession went.’

Anyone would be curious about whether the person they liked had gotten together with someone or not.

However, even with the confession, he’d been surprised at how little Haruki and Natsuki’s behavior around each other had changed. They did seem a little closer than before, but only as childhood friends and nothing more.

‘And I got some weird text from Natsuki, too.’

Picking up his smart phone from the desk, he opened up Natsuki’s text.

There was no title, and body of the text was brief.

“Could I ask you for a favor tomorrow?

Wait for me in the classroom at 6:20 PM.”

The time that she’d appointed was five minutes before the last school bell.

He couldn’t imagine what she could have planned for him there, at that time, at that place.

‘Does she want to do one last confession rehearsal before the real thing….?’

Was that why she’d picked out the specific time and place, to set the mood for it?

‘…There’s still some time before then, so guess I’ll clean up a bit.’

It didn’t matter how much he mulled it over, the answer wasn’t just going to come to him so easily.

Going back to glaring at the work schedule that he’d made at home, not even one minute had passed before he was pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration.

It’d been one week since the Student Council had heard about their new movie to commemorate their graduation, and offered to hold a screening for it the day before the ceremony.

‘I was surprised that Haruki agreed to it to easily.’

At first, Yuu and the rest of the Film Club had been against it.

They'd rather the audience be people that were personally interested in seeing the movie, but being an event arranged by the Student Council, the programming didn't hold any particularly special meaning.

The moment after he'd finished hearing the offer, Haruki hadn't bothered with beating around the bush, and had sharply turned them down.

"If we have it screened the day before the ceremony, there's a high chance that there will be a bias with the viewers, right? Since we'd like it to be viewed with an open mind, that'd be a problem for us."

Still, the Student Council President wouldn't back down, and passionately insisted,

"But I'm a fan of the Film Club!"

"What, really? Wow, thanks!"

The first one to be won over was Souta.

He was the most honest and simple-minded of the three, and started grinning at the Student Council President after that comment.

'Geez, Souta fell for that way too easily.'

Despite what he'd said, it was obvious that Haruki was on the fence about it.

Yuu had been keeping quiet the entire time to hold his position, but he hadn't been able to keep up seeming like a really stubborn tsundere.

The president, seemingly encouraged by their change in behavior, started speaking even more heatedly than before.

"We really respect you, and all we want is your movie to be watched by as many people as possible!"

In the end, those words had been the winning move, and their graduation commemoration film would now be screened for the whole school.

'Well, it's great that we accepted the offer and all, but this schedule is insane…!'

To make matters worse, since it was an event sponsored by the Student Council, they had to have regular staff meetings to ensure the movie would be

finished on time.

In the worst case scenario, even if they didn't make it for the graduation ceremony, they had until spring break to finish it.

And that was how Yuu and the others, who had been taking it easy up until then, were now running around like their pants were on fire.

"But if there's one thing for sure, it's that Mochita doesn't have the makings of a director at all."

Yuu let out a weak laugh.

The next moment, as if on cue, the door shook.

Lately, the door was in worse shape than ever, and as it opened with a groaning sound, Haruki peeked in, panting with his shoulders heaving.

"H-Hey… Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Ahem! It's, uh–good work."

He was going to have a quick word with Haruki once he showed up, but he realized that now wasn't the time for that.

Yuu cleared his throat and fought back the words bubbling up in the back of his throat.

"Took you a while. What kind of detour did you take today?"

"Uhh, yeah…. Anyway, where's Mochita?"

Although curious about Haruki dodging the question, something he rarely did, Yuu went along with the change of topic.

"At the briefing session for those who passed the entrance exams."

Proving that his confidence hadn't been just for show, Mochita had been the first out of the three of them to pass the recommendation entrance exams.

"…You just took the exam for general admissions, right, Yuu?"

At the sudden question, he wondered whether or not he should ask the reason for it this time.

However, he remembered what he'd heard from Souta and paused.

“I heard that Haruki might be studying at a university in America.”

Even up to this day, neither Yuu nor Souta had heard Haruki mention anything about that himself.

Haruki would bring up his ambitions on his own when the time was right. While that did give him the strength to inspire those around him, it also only made it look like he needed support for his own case.

It was like they were all fighting on their own, and Haruki had the strong resolve to hide his strategy until he sure that it would yield results.

‘That’s probably why he hasn’t said anything to us.’

Convincing himself of this, Yuu smiled as if nothing was wrong.

“Chances are low, but I’ll try applying for a recommendation next month, too.”

“….I see.”

“Yeah.”

The conversation came to a halt there, and the sound of Haruki pulling a chair out echoed unpleasantly.

‘This… This is awkward…. I never thought I’d have try to hard to come up with something to talk about with Haruki.’

Naturally, he couldn’t mention Natsuki’s name, but somehow, it felt like taboo to bring up anything about Miou, either.

But all that aside, the two of them were close childhood friends.

There were times when he’d intended to choose a completely random conversation topic, and they’d end up relating to it in some unexpected way. In fact, just yesterday, they’d started off talking about a quiz, and yet somehow Natsuki had almost come up in the conversation, sending him into a state of panic.

After Yuu spent several more minutes of silent distress, Haruki suddenly spoke up.

“Do you remember that video I made that year?”

“Huh? Yeah, that documentary on the baseball club, right?”

The short film that Haruki had shown him in the winter of their second year was a work that he’d produced entirely on his own.

He remembered it being a beautiful film centered around the music and pictures, and dialogue kept to a bare minimum.

“Come to think of it, didn’t you say that you submitted it for some kind of contest? Are the results…”

Suddenly, this had become the topic of conversation.

And as his question shifted to one of conviction, his next words slipped away from him.

‘Wait, so the reason that Haruki’s been feeling so uneasy lately is because….’

Haruki nodded with a slight grunt and finished Yuu’s sentence.

“I won the grand prize.”

“Congratulations… right?”

Yuu asked in a shaky voice, and Haruki forced a laugh and a faint shrug.

“Mm, thanks. I’m pretty happy about the fact that I won, too.”

“Then, what’s the problem? Was there some kind of additional prize or conditions that came with it?”

He was pretty certain that he knew what it was already, but he had to make sure.

Impatiently, he stood up and walked over to Haruki.

In contrast with Yuu, who was visibly upset, Haruki answered in a voice laced with light laughter.

“Sharp as always, Yuu. The bonus is that I’ve been invited to study abroad for college.”

“…Have…. you already told the others about this?”

“No, you’re the first. I plan to tell Mochita about it tomorrow, too.”

While listening to his heart beat to an unsettling rhythm, Yuu asked in a

husky voice,

“And what about Natsuki….?”

“Mm, I’m not sure about letting her know. Knowing her, she’ll just worry.”

“What do you mean by that…?”

Was he denying all responsibility even after he’d confessed to her?

He felt like he could scream, but seeing the somehow sad look on Haruki’s face made the breath catch in his throat.

‘Ugh, there it is again… Why do I feel so uneasy…?’

Why did Haruki seem so hesitant now, when he was usually one to face everything head on?

Was it because he thought he couldn’t do something he couldn’t take responsibility for?

‘…Ah! It all makes sense to me now.’

As if it had fallen straight down from the sky, the answer suddenly came to him.

Most likely, the one that Haruki liked was Miou.

But ever since the contest, he realized that he couldn’t just confess to her without fulfilling a responsibility.

‘When I asked if he was going out with Miou or not, he didn’t say anything, but he didn’t deny it, either…’

No, it wasn’t that he didn’t want to answer; he couldn’t.

He probably wasn’t worried about Yuu and Souta spreading rumors about him liking Miou, but he probably thought they’d badger him about why he hadn’t confessed to her yet. If that was true, then the only thing he could do was keep quiet about it altogether.

“And what would be the point in asking? If I told you that I was going out with Aida…. No, that’s not right. If I said that I liked anyone other than Natsuki, you’ll feel relieved, right? And then what?”

Haruki had been genuinely encouraging Yuu that time.

As if to say, "Even if I can't do it, make sure that you do."

"Yuu, you really like Natsuki, don't you? Then have a little more confidence in yourself."

He wasn't saying something irresponsible.

He was just giving him a push from behind, as a childhood friend, and as another man.

That was why Yuu looked Haruki in the eye and said back to him,

"Don't you dare leave behind any regrets either, then."

Haruki widened his eyes slightly, and then let out a soft laugh.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

After Akari and Miou saw her off, Natsuki headed up to the 3-2 classroom.

As she climbed the quiet staircase, her heart beat faster the closer she got.

By the time she made it to the door of the classroom, her heart was pounding so fast, it felt like it might leap out of her chest.

'This feels just like before.'

Clenching the front of her shirt, the memory of the scenery from that summer day came flooding back.

Underneath the track pants she wore under her skirt, her legs were shaking.

'But it won't be like last time…'

It had been three months since she'd started doing the confession rehearsals, and now, winter's footsteps were approaching.

Day by day, the environment that surrounded Natsuki and the others was changing.

'I've changed since then, too!'

Just like when she stood up on the diving board when swimming, Natsuki slowly took in a deep breath.

In her head, she heard the "On your marks, get ready" call echo in her head, and using that as her timing, she threw open the door.

"Yuu! Sorry to have kept you waiting!"

"What's with you, all fired up? It's like you're ready for a duel or something."

Letting out a laugh, Yuu put down the book he'd been reading on the desk.

'A duel… huh… I guess it does seem that way.'

Strangely agreeing with his observation, Natsuki walked briskly over to Yuu's window seat.

Yuu stood up from his seat as well, and waited for her to reach him. It'd been so long since they'd talked alone like this. Just feeling his eyes on her made her face start to heat up.

"So, what kind of favor did you come to ask for today?"

Once Natsuki was only about three steps away, Yuu asked this in a teasing tone.

Natsuki stopped, and held out the envelope that she'd been holding under her arm.

"I finished this last night."

Yuu seemed surprised somehow, and blinked in confusion.

He simply stood there with a blank look on his face for a while until Natsuki impatiently waved the envelope in his direction.

"Oh, yeah, sorry…."

She'd finally gotten him to take the envelope, but he still looked puzzled.

Though she thought that strange, Natsuki started to explain the contents of the envelope.

"That's the manuscript that I mentioned before. Will you be the first one to read it?"

Her voice was cracking because of how nervous she was, and she couldn't smile normally like she usually did, either.

But still, it was important that she'd taken this first step, Natsuki told herself as she waited for Yuu's reply.

"If this is a 'rehearsal' too, I won't read it."

The words she heard in response were unexpected.

Feeling like she'd been stabbed in the chest, she unconsciously took a step back.

'No, I shouldn't be feeling hurt right now.'

This was what she deserved for treating Yuu so poorly the whole time; he wasn't at fault here.

She knew that, but the fact that she wasn't being taken seriously made tears threaten to spill.

"Then…. if it's the 'real thing,' will you read it?"

She said it. This time, she finally managed to say it.

Curious about Yuu's reaction, she looked up to see a sad look on his face.

"'Then'….? Natsuki, are you really fine with this?"

"Of course, I'm saying that it is, aren't I?"

'What is it that's making him act like this?'

Puzzled, Natsuki kept on pressing him, but he just looked even more disappointed.

"….I feel like I don't really understand you anymore."

"Th-That's my line! What exactly are you trying to say here?!"

What Yuu said had set her off, and without thinking twice, she shot back heated words at him.

Yuu immediately looked annoyed, and as if trying to calm down, he ran his fingers through his hair.

'How did it turn out this way….?'

It was like they weren't even on the same page.

In all of her confusion right now, all she knew was that the situation had gone beyond her understanding.

Holding back the urge to cry, Natsuki looked down at her feet.

"….The teachers are going to lock everything up soon, so let's just go home for today."

Sighing, Yuu turned around and started walking away.

He left the envelope with the manuscript on Natsuki's desk as he passed by it, and was about to leave the room.

"Wait!"

Before she could think twice about it, Natsuki caught up to him and grabbed his wrist.

She stopped him from walking any further, but he didn't turn back around. She tried to make him turn towards her by force, but she wasn't strong enough to even get him to budge.

'I can't stand it ending like this, without being able to tell him how I feel….!'

Realizing that this might be her last chance, she yelled towards his motionless back.

"Everything I said about a confession rehearsal was a lie! You're the one that I like, so much that I can't take it!"

Yuu turned around and stared back at her with wide eyes.

Natsuki felt like running away, but she bit down on her lip and held her ground.

"I-I'm not very girly… get jealous easily, and I don't like it when I'm not taken out on dates often… I'm a self-centered idiot that gets worked up over stupid stuff, but…"

As she spoke, the tears kept on building up.

Was she crying because she was sad, or just because she couldn't hold back her emotions anymore?

All she knew was that she had feelings for Yuu, feelings of not wanting to be

hated by Yuu.

And that was why she was challenging the limits of those feelings.

“But I want you to go out with me!”

She could hear distressed breathing, separate from the violent beating of her own heart.

Yuu opened and closed his mouth a few times, searching for the right words.

Every second felt like an eternity, and Natsuki could feel her mind drifting off somewhere far away.

Her entire body started to feel weak, and her grip on Yuu’s hand loosened.

‘Maybe… it really is hopeless.’

Knowing how kind Yuu was, he was probably thinking of how to reject her without hurting her feelings.

If she just lied again and said that this was another rehearsal, Yuu wouldn’t have to feel burdened by it. It was worth considering pulling back one more time, and rethink her strategy.

‘….No, if I do that, nothing’s going to change.’

She told herself that it was for Yuu’s sake, but in reality, she was just trying to avoid getting hurt.

Though she hated to admit it, she knew how weak and unfair she could be. She couldn’t keep lying to herself anymore.

And more importantly, if she ran away now, all of her hard work up until this point would have been for nothing.

‘I’ve already decided that I wasn’t going to run away anymore.’

Biting on her lip, Natsuki looked back up at Yuu.

Yuu seemed to have made up his mind as well, and no longer seemed so troubled.

Natsuki was captivated by the firm, determined look in his eyes.

“Obviously, I’m the only one that could put up with you, right?”

Yuu's stiff expression broke, replaced with one that looked like something between laughing and crying.

'He's the only one…? Then, that means….'

As Natsuki stared back at him in a daze, he patted her on the head.

When she looked up at him with eyes filled with both uneasiness and anticipation, he pulled her into his arms.

"Wh– Huh?!"

"I finally caught you,"

She heard Yuu's quivering voice say from above her.

She could feel his warm hands behind her head and her back, and in front of her, was Yuu's shoulder.

'W-Wait, this is….'

Finally realizing that Yuu was hugging her, her tear-stained cheeks filled with heat again.

'Ah… I can hear Yuu's heartbeat.'

Just like how Natsuki could hear the beating of his heart with her ears, Yuu must have felt her heartbeat, as well. Standing close to each other like this, she felt like their separately beating hearts were gradually starting to beat in sync.

"Natsuki,"

Yuu said in the kindest voice she'd ever heard him speak in.

She nodded a bit, and he strengthened his arms around her.

"Me too, I feel the same way."

"….I'm glad."

That day, Natsuki held hands with Yuu for the very first time.

Not as childhood friends, but as boyfriend and girlfriend.

——

epilogue

After she'd put on her shoes in the entrance hall, Natsuki kept clenching and unclenching her hand around the doorknob.

From an outsider's point of view, the action probably seemed like strange behavior, but for Natsuki, it was inevitable.

'Th-this is it… Our first date at his house….!'

On the weekends, they'd spend the day at one of their houses–

They'd put a hold on this tradition since summer vacation, but today, they'd finally started it up again.

They hadn't outright made an promise to do so, but as childhood friends, it just felt like the right thing. The fact that they both started getting antsy with the weekend drawing close was proof of that.

'I've already done everything that I could, but….'

Miraculously, she'd woken up before her phone alarm, and put up her hair more neatly than she usually did. She'd picked out her outfit the night before, and checked herself in the mirror several times.

As a present, she'd brought the cake that she'd made together with Miou and Akari.

"It'll work out somehow or other!"

Natsuki slapped her cheeks with both hands to pump herself up, and headed for the house next door.

Today, she would finally hear the words she wanted to hear from Yuu.

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"I came to bring you a present for all your hard work~"

"You sure you don't mean you're here to disturb me?"

Throwing open the door with gusto, she saw that the room's occupant was still in bed.

Yuu burrowed under the blankets as if to hide from Natsuki, and rolled over in bed, facing his back towards her.

“Hold on, Yuu, is it alright for a test taker to be going back to sleep like this?”

“I’ll have you know, it’s only been two hours since I got into bed!”

“Huh? Another all-nighter? You shouldn’t overdo it, you know?”

“Yeah, so let me sleep!”

The moment Natsuki stuck out her lips in a pout, she came back to her senses.

If she kept acting like this, it would be like they were still just childhood friends.

Natsuki shook her head, and told herself to get a grip.

‘If I’m not careful about what I say, things are never going to move forward….!’

Even if she had to resort to brute force, she had to try and overcome this situation.

Ready to give it another go, Natsuki started walking towards the bed.

She yanked the blankets off the bed and dropped them right onto the floor.

Naturally, Yuu shot up and looked at her in outrage.

“Wha– Natsuki! Didn’t you just say that I shouldn’t overdo it?!”

“That’s true, but I have something more important to talk to you about!”

As soon as she said this, Natsuki could almost feel herself going pale.

She knew that she had to be careful about what she said now, but even she was surprised at herself with how straight-to-the-point she’d just been.

‘I was planning to be a little more subtle about it, but….’

Yuu could be a bit dense sometimes, so there was a chance he wouldn’t catch on if she wasn’t straightforward about it.

‘In times like these, you just have to go ahead and do it….!’

Grabbing a confused Yuu by the shoulders, she leaned up close to his face.

“Wh-What is it? Seriously, Natsuki, what’s wrong with you?”

“Yuu… Do you like me?”

Silence filled the room for the next minute.

Yuu sat with his mouth agape, looking back at Natsuki, whose face was so close he could feel her breath.

"….Um, you're asking me this just now?"

The words that finally made their way from his mouth exhausted her patience.

Taking a deep breath, she said as loudly as she could,

"I'm asking you now because I've never once heard you tell me that you like me since we started dating!"

Silence filled the room again.

This time, Yuu looked annoyed, as one would expect, but slowly, he started to pale.

"Wait, seriously….?"

"Yes, I'm serious! When I confessed, all you said was, 'Me too, I feel the same way,' but that was it!"

"Ughh, don't repeat it word for word! God, this so embarrassing I could die…"

Natsuki stared intently as Yuu clutched his head and tumbled back down on the bed.

"That time, you said, 'I finally caught you,' which means you've liked back me for a while, right? Then you should have just told me so when we were doing confession rehearsals…."

She took this chance to confess the feelings that had been spiraling in her chest all this time.

Yuu bolted upright in bed, and facing Natsuki, rebutted with an annoyed look on his face.

"What?! But those were rehearsals, not real confessions, remember? It was normal for me to assume that there was someone else you really liked. There's no way I could've had the guts to do that when I was, in a way, being rejected."

As Yuu confessed this begrudgedly, Natsuki was at a loss for words.

Yuu looked back at her in silence for a moment, and then scoffed and smiled.

“And anyway…. I didn’t have the confidence to, either. Haruki’s talented enough as a movie director to win an award for it, and Mochita’s an amazing scriptwriter, but I couldn’t do anything….”

‘No way…. Yuu felt that way, too?’

At first, she was genuine surprised.

And then she started to feel frustrated for being so self-centered that she never even realizing any of this before.

“But, I made up my mind. I decided that I’d just be myself, and aim to become a producer.”

Yuu spoke with conviction, his face happier than words could describe.

Natsuki, overwhelmed by so many emotions at once, could only nod.

“Geez, you look like you’re about to cry again.”

Standing up, Yuu reached out and cradled her cheek in his hand.

He smiled at her with a look that seemed to say, “What am I going to do with you?” but somehow, he looked kind of happy, too.

“The day before the graduation ceremony, the Student Council is going to be holding a screening for our movie, and I’ll be helping out with some things there, too. It’s going to be like a joint project, so look forward to it.”

“Yeah….!”

Holding back her tears, Natsuki nodded, and after patting her hair, Yuu took his hand back.

And then, Yuu pulled her forward by the arm, and held Natsuki close to his chest.

“Huh? Yuu?”

Instead of answering her with words, Yuu’s arms tightened around her.

Just like that day in the classroom, they could hear each other’s heartbeats.

It wasn't only Natsuki's, but Yuu's heart as well, that was pounding.

"And also…."

"Y-Yeah?"

Natsuki's voice cracked from how nervous she was, and her face felt like it was on fire.

Yuu, who also seemed to be at his limits, laughed loudly, lightening the tense atmosphere.

"I think it's better doing it this way."

Before Natsuki could ask him what he meant, Yuu said with a smile,

"I like you."

"S-Saying it out of nowhere like that is against the rules! Say it one more time, now that I'm ready."

"Whaaat? Not possible, it's bad for my heart."

"Right? When I confessed, I had to overcome that kind of nervousness too, you know."

"Yeah, yeah, and I'm grateful for it."

"Say it like you mean it!"

After that, the conversation went as it usually did.

As their lively voices echoed around the room, in the drawer of the study desk awaited a pair of matching couple's rings.

The End.